



On My Watch: The Role and Responsibilities of American College Trustees

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On My Watch: The Role and Responsibilities of American College Trustees

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of the Graduate School of Education of Harvard University
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for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Dedication

To my grandmother

Mary Lee Toomer

I know you're proud of me.

Acknowledgements

The research and writing that went into this dissertation are my own. But I did not do it alone. A large community of individuals—advisors and mentors, colleagues and classmates, family and friends, and trustees—together helped ensure that I produced this work.

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Abstract

New waves of change are upon American colleges and universities. Among other things, shifts in student demographics, federal higher education policy changes, and the continuing rise of new education providers are putting pressure on institutions to adapt in order to ensure their effectiveness and, in some cases, survival. The imperative to adapt to change is not new for American colleges and universities. Since the founding of the colonial colleges, the nation's institutions have refashioned themselves over time in response to a dynamic environment—often with great success. Less obvious, however, is how institutions' internal actors perceive their role in managing change. Most notably, little research is available to shed light on whether and how trustees—an institution's only legal fiduciaries—view their responsibility for preserving and adapting elements of an institution's mission and identity in response to a shifting reality.

This dissertation aims to extend what we know about trustees' responsibilities, including their responsibility for managing change. To meet this objective, I draw upon interview data that I collected from a sample of private college trustee board chairs (n=25). The conversations were loosely guided by three questions:

- 1) What are trustees' perceptions of “good” trusteeship?
- 2) When does change to an institution's mission or identity become the focus of trustees' attention?

3) How do trustees make sense of decisions to preserve or adapt important aspects of an institution's mission or identity?

My findings suggest that trustees' perception of their responsibilities, including responsibility for managing change, generally align with historical definitions of trusteeship. I also identify three occasion types—Structural, Board, and Environmental—during which identity or mission change become a focus of trustees' discussions. Finally, I present an array of explanations and rationales that surface during our conversations about trustees' decisions to preserve or adapt an aspect of an institution's mission or identity.

Chapter 1. – Introduction

American colleges and universities have been beset by waves of change that are predicted to influence whether, and how, they will endure (Cronin & Horton, 2009; Hoover, 2013; Marcus, 2012; Pope & Writer, 2012; Powell, 2013). For many colleges, particularly in New England and the Midwest, student demographic shifts have given way to declining enrollment, putting pressure on these institutions to find new sources of revenue (Belkin, 2013; Carlson, Blumenstyk, & Thomason, 2013; Douglas, 2013; Noel-Levitz, 2010; Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010). The entrance of online institutions into the higher education sector has sparked debate on the relevance and survival of residential education (Aoun, 2012; Cronin & Horton, 2009). Advancements in technology, including the development of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), promise new pathways for teaching and learning, motivating many schools to find ways to leverage digital resources to their advantage (Aoun, 2012; Selingo, 2013). Finally, the federal government has brought its influence to bear in an effort to spark improvements in such areas as college cost, graduation rates, and student-loan debt burden (Doubleday, 2013; Field, 2013; Garanzini, 2013).

The nation's post-secondary schools are among the oldest and most enduring institutions in America, and the history of higher education in this country is characterized by long periods of stability. It is also characterized by episodic change; during those periods, colleges and universities have endeavored to adapt accordingly. Indeed, as Bok (2013) notes, our institutions have shown

great skill at transforming themselves when necessary. For instance, anticlerical sentiment and “an effort to replace guild-like forms of professional self-government with decision making by ‘disinterested’ businessmen,” motivated early American institutions to shift governing boards from a ministerial to a more secular membership and control (Hall, 1997, p. 14). The modern university can be viewed as the higher education system’s reaction to, among other changes, dissatisfaction among late nineteenth century educated Americans with a standardized college curriculum (Reuben, 1996). Shifting attitudes on equality, the dismantling of de jure segregation, and competitive pressure compelled institutions to widen access to include women and students from minority racial and ethnic groups (Lucas, 2006).

More recently, the Harvard Corporation, one half of the nation’s oldest trustee board, voted to double its membership to improve the board’s capacity to better steward the university in the 21st century (Governance Review, 2010; Khurana & Baldwin, 2011). Middlebury College has invested in a for-profit, online, language learning system to lessen the school’s tuition dependence (Liebowitz & Fritz, 2010). Northeastern University in Boston, historically a regional institution, has launched campuses in Seattle, Washington and Charlotte, North Carolina as part of a plan to capitalize upon burgeoning student markets that lie outside of New England (Northeastern University, 2012).

The above examples raise a question: who is responsible for institutional change? Notwithstanding varying opinions on who decides change at a college or

university (Selingo, 2013), a trustee board is the only group with explicit fiduciary rights and responsibilities for an institution. A board's authority originates in the statute, charter, or other incorporating document typically granted by the state (Birnbaum, 1988; Kaplin & Lee, 2006). Indeed, strictly interpreted, the lay (i.e., non-employee) trustee board is the institution, and exercises ultimate authority within it (Beck, 1947; Herron, 1969; Rauh, 1969). Throughout history, trustees have leveraged this authority, adapting institutions to the environment by, for example, hiring or firing the president, approving an institution's strategic plan, or setting its fundraising campaign priorities. In doing so, trustees have served as mediators between internal forces—such as the president and faculty—and external pressures including the government or changing societal attitudes toward higher education. Yet it is not a given that trustees view themselves as change agents. Even less clear is whether and when these men and women view themselves as responsible for protection of certain aspects of their institutions

Study Rationale

This study is about trustees' perceptions of "good" governance, and whether and when protection of the institution's original mission and identity becomes a focus of trustee boards. This research is important because it helps fill gaps in what we know about trustees' perception of their role as college and university stewards. Specifically, this study is timely and necessary for several reasons. First, this research extends current understanding of how trustees'

perceive and make sense of their responsibilities at an institution, the findings from which may inform how board members are educated, supported, and held accountable. Next, this work will shed light on the role trustees play as change managers—and advocates for the status quo—during periods when there are abundant calls for change. Finally, my study will examine why trustees endeavor to adapt or preserve aspects of their institutions, the outcomes of which may be strategies that promote an institution's longevity or, conceivably, decisions that hasten an institution's demise.

Chapter 2. Literature Review and Context

Three sets of literature help set the stage for examining trustees' perceptions of their role among American colleges: the history and legal origins of trusteeship; normative literature on trustee responsibilities; and empirical research on trustee board composition and trustees' effect on institutions.

Legal Origins of American Trusteeship

Early Trustee Board Models

Emerging in America as part of the founding of the colonial colleges, the board of trustees has endured to the present, becoming a standard feature of higher education in the United States. Indeed, notwithstanding the wide variation in the level and kind of institutions that comprise the American higher education system, the internal governance structures of all institutions—public and private, 2- and 4-year, secular and religious—are remarkably similar. In general, every institution has a board of trustees at the top of its hierarchy (Duryea & Williams, 2000; Kaplin & Lee, 2004).

The origin of the American college governance structure extends back to the founding of Harvard College which, in 1637, had its original charter amended to include a provision for a committee to oversee the school (Morison, 1935; Duryea & Williams, 2000). Deemed the Board of Overseers in 1642, this group of six court magistrates and six ministers—all men—was tasked with overseeing the young college's functioning. The college obtained another charter in 1650 at the

urging of then-president Henry Dunster. This document gave rise to the creation of the Corporation, a governance group comprised of the president, treasurer and five teaching fellows (Duryea & Williams, 2000)¹. With the consent of the Board of Overseers, the Corporation was charged with initiating policy and action. Specifically, the Corporation was to manage the affairs of the college, while the ex officio Overseers were to "provide accountability to church and state" (Hall, 1997).

However, most institutions did not follow Harvard's bicameral governance model. Instead, Yale set the organizational precedent that all other colonial colleges followed, and that is commonly observed among institutions today² (Duryea & Williams, 2000). In May of 1745, the Connecticut legislature approved an act for the full establishment of Yale College. The institution's charter sanctioned a single board, composed of the president and fellows, that granted rights to receive and manage bequests and donations, use a common seal, manage the school's affairs, establish laws, rules, and regulations for internal management, and confer honors, degrees, and licenses.

¹ Harvard's founding and the development of its governance structure was not without controversy. Indeed, the English Court of Chancery annulled the college's charter in 1684 owing to an issue of legality. The court maintained that only the Crown, not a corporation (i.e., the General Court of Massachusetts), could grant charters (Duryea & Williams, 2000).

² Brown University is the exception among the colonial colleges, establishing instead a bicameral governance structure.

The Legal Concept of Incorporation

Harvard and Yale were founded through the granting of a charter, the terms of which established the institutions as corporations. This legal concept has its origins in first- to fifth-century Rome during which time “rulers established legal processes designed to encourage the creation of desirable social institutions separate from agencies of the state, but at the same time subject to their dominion” (Duryea & Williams, 2000; pp. 10). However the more recent precedent for incorporation of colleges and universities came from England which, by the time Henry VIII broke the country away from the Roman Catholic Church, had evolved its legal system, including the parameters for corporations. This, in turn, provided the template for legal practice in the colonies, including the corporate nature of American college and university government (Duryea & Williams, 2000). Duryea & Williams (2000) point to five characteristics or rights that accrued to incorporated associations, including college trustee boards, in early colonial America: the right to 1) perpetual succession; 2) to sue and be sued; 3) to purchase lands and hold them in succession; 4) to have a common seal; and 5) to make by-laws or statutes for the regulation of their affairs.

The Charter

Among private colleges, a board’s source of authority is the article of incorporation (i.e., charter) and the state corporation laws under which that charter is granted. The actual power is generally assigned to the board, an entity distinct

from its individual members, although charter provisions, board by-laws, or resolutions may delegate authority to individual trustees or committees to act on the board's behalf under certain circumstances (Kaplin & Lee, 2006). Of course, charter terms vary across institutions. However, discussion of some features—board size, trustee selection, and term limits—is evident in every institution's charter (Elliot & Chambers, 1934). Among private institutions especially, the charter delineates the corporation rights of the board described earlier, including the right to receive gifts. Importantly, a charter does not define good or effective trusteeship. While it details the rights and responsibilities of the trustees, it does not spell out how a good fiduciary will leverage those things for the good of the institution.

Of the rights granted to private college trustee boards, three are worth special mention: self-perpetuation, lay membership, and ultimate authority. These distinguish governance among American institutions from models in Europe and elsewhere. Boards are self-perpetuating. Vacancies are filled through appointment or election (Hall, 1997). A trustee seat is equivalent to an office: individuals occupy and vacate seats, but the seat remains with the institution. Some scholars argue that the exclusive right to decide who joins the board helps explain institutions' adaptability and durability over time:

Governing boards, with some exceptions of course, have made an extraordinary adjustment to changes occurring around them. Their corporate structure, both in the public and the private domains, has allowed the selection of new board members who have brought to boards a responsiveness to the changing values and needs of the nation. Under the

control of corporate, higher education as a system of colleges and universities has assimilated an expanded view of instruction and learning, of the extension of knowledge, and of public service (Duryea & Williams, 2000, pp. 222).

As lay members, trustees are predominantly non-employee volunteers for the institution. Thus, as private citizens, they are tasked with promoting the interests of the institution and society. The idea is that these men and women are free from state and institution influence, and thus positioned to consider the needs of society as well as the intentions of an institution's founders (Duryea & Williams, 2000; Hall, 1997). Finally, trustee boards retain ultimate authority among the institutions and post-secondary systems that they serve (Rauh, 1969; Hall, 1997). Though they are subject to the state or other body that granted their charter, boards are otherwise accountable only to "their consciences and to God" (Hall, 1997, p. 5). As such, more so than any constituency on campus, boards are positioned to bring a considerable amount of influence to bear on the direction of a college or university, including, at times, its closure. A striking contemporary example of the board's authority is evident at Sweetbriar College. On February 28th, 2015, the board of the 114-year-old all-women's college in Virginia voted to close the institution in August of that year (Kolowich, 2015). Notwithstanding the objections of the local county and various constituents—faculty, students, staff, and alumni—the state has affirmed the board's right to shutter the institution (Kapsidelis, 2015).

Challenges of Trusteeship

A variety of challenges, internal and external, confront trustees in their work. Notwithstanding their apparent power, for instance, trustee boards are not autonomous actors. Indeed, boards of public and private institutions are accountable to a designee (e.g., the state) as outlined in the charter or other incorporating document. As Kaplin & Lee (2006) observe, the states are generally viewed as the external governors of higher education vis-à-vis legal theory. Each state has the power to create, support, and dissolve public institutions as well as police powers with which they can grant charters and recognize private institutions' authority to grant degrees (2006). Indeed, a state can limit a board's ability to act if it believes that the board has abused its authority (2006). States have taxation and police powers that apply to private colleges and universities; institutions must uphold their obligation to provide an educational service to the public else they risk losing their tax-exempt status (2006). As important, it is the state judicial system that establishes and enforces the "common law of contracts and torts that forms the foundation of the legal relationship between institutions and their faculty members, students, administrators, and staffs" (Kaplin & Lee, 2006; pp. 25).

The federal government also brings influence to bear on the actions of higher education trustee boards. Through federal aid, the government can compel institutions to adhere to processes for accommodating students with disabilities, promoting racial and ethnic diversity, and preventing and remedying sexual

discrimination and harassment (Kaplin & Lee, 2006). Furthermore, the federal government exercises an implied power, spelling out rules and guidelines for how granted aid may be spent, and recognizing the accrediting bodies upon whose judgments the government relies for determining federal aid eligibility (2006).

Internal actors and organizational culture can also limit trustees' ability to act. A history and tradition of shared governance and academic freedom in higher education at times limit the kind and degree of power that trustees exercise at an institution. Further, as McLaughlin (1985) and McLaughlin & Riesman (1990) point out, even the board's role in appointing a new president is no longer viewed as their strict purview. Changes in faculty, student, and alumni attitudes have changed how many presidential searches are conducted today.

Trustees' own experience, or lack thereof, can also constrain their ability to effectively govern a complex education organization. Most board members' professional experience lies outside of education. In 2010, only about 12% of trustees of independent colleges and universities were employed in education (Schwartz & Bakerman, 2010). On one hand, this outsider status may be central to their ability to represent both the institution and the public (Birnbaum, 1988). On the other hand, trustees' inexperience with education administration reinforces the importance of appointing a good president, and reveals why the board may rely heavily upon the president for direction—a reliance that may have important

implications for how the board sets an agenda and establishes priorities (Herron, 1969).

Finally, trustees are challenged to ensure governance, not management, of an institution. The latter role is the purview of the president and administrative staff. However, as Wood (1985) writes, trustees' professional familiarity with paperwork and information, and clear, decisive thinking on concrete issues, may seduce them into erring on the side of administrative work and functions rather than broad policy issues and direction setting. Taken together, the challenges to trusteeship that I describe above suggest that it is not a given that boards perceive themselves as primary or effective actors in facilitating change among institutions. Indeed, even if they do, it is possible that their actions and behavior are not consistent with their view of themselves. Thus, trustees are interesting and appropriate subjects for a study on institutional change.

Normative Conceptions of College Trusteeship

The normative literature is a vast body of work that offers analyses of and prescriptions for "good" trusteeship. This body of literature stands apart from the descriptive literature on trusteeship because the ideas and conclusions presented in these works are frequently not derived from an empirical research approach. Instead, authors often draw upon anecdote and personal experience to support their claims. This is not to suggest that the normative literature is not a useful or legitimate source for shedding light on what we know about trustees. Indeed, this

robust body of work offers key insights into conventional understandings of trusteeship, including whether and how a board is operating appropriately and effectively. It is significant, however, that the conclusions drawn within this literature are frequently not empirically derived. The limited evidence on whether and how trustees view their role provides an opportunity to narrow the gap between what we believe trustees do—or should do—and what we know they do or believe they should do.

The Role and Responsibilities of College Trustees

The range of the normative literature is vast, evidence of the “deluge of books and articles on boards and their responsibilities” that Hall (1997, p. 18) observes were written once the composition of non-profit boards shifted from a Protestant elite to individuals with no prior board experience and different views on organizational and community leadership. The literature opines on, for example, how boards should modernize their structure and process (Corson, 1975), understand their moral responsibility (Smith, 1995), approach effective trusteeship as an art (Widmer & Houchin, 2000), govern more and manage less (Chait, 2003), or negotiate competing conceptions of academic governance (Tierney, 2004). The aspect of the literature most relevant to this research, however, pertains to the role and responsibilities of trustees.

The literature has a long history of explaining and opining on what trustees do. For instance, Collis (2004) summarizes the trustee role as strategy setting,

stating that the setting of an institution's long-term direction is the most challenging aspect of trusteeship. Lyall (2001) points to public trustees' emerging role as accountability agents, a shift from their responsibility to serve as advocates for the institution in society. Bowen (1994) underscores the trustees' responsibility for mission, arguing that attention and commitment to this concern—not shareholder value—distinguishes for-profit directors from non-profit trustees. He maintains that non-profit board members, including college trustees, must exercise a “duty of obedience” (1994, pp. 21) that compels them to act in accordance with the organization's stated mission. Kerr & Gade (1989) extol the American system of higher education and its governing board, pointing to the latter as one of several explanations for the success of American colleges and universities. Distinguishing the American model of governance from forms abroad—government ministries, student and faculty guilds—the authors view trustees as guardians, the single function of which is to protect an institution's long-term welfare, autonomy, and academic freedom, among other aspects (1989).

Perceptions of trusteeship in the normative literature have generally remained consistent over time. Indeed, current descriptions of the role and responsibilities of trustees capture the spirit of Leonard Bacon's (1847) conception of what trustees should be. In his essay “Responsibility in the Management of Societies,” Bacon (1847) identifies five tasks that non-profit trustees should undertake:

1. The managers³ should represent society, specifically the interests of the past and present contributors to the organization.
2. The group should be a deliberative body, actively examining the work of the administration and, upon finding it satisfactory, approving it.
3. A board should be small enough to ensure that business can be conducted, that individuals have a sense of personal responsibility.
4. The focus of trustees' work must be supervision, not administration.
5. Members should be carefully selected.

Bacon's (1847) ideas are not expressly written for colleges and universities, but for non-profit organizations more broadly. Nevertheless, he provides a conception of trustee responsibilities that is reflected in more contemporary prescriptions for what college trustees should do. Among the more commonly referenced sources for the role of the trustee are The American Association of University Professors' (2006) Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities; the Carnegie Foundation's (1973) report on the governance of higher education; and the Association of Governing Boards' (2010) Statement on Board Responsibility for Institutional Governance.

In Appendix A, I present a table summarizing the AAUP (2006), Carnegie Foundation (1973), and AGB (2010) views on trusteeship. The first three rows illustrate areas of agreement on trustee responsibilities across the organizations. First, the board is the ultimate authority at the institution, responsible for its governance and for serving as the final arbiter of disputes among students, faculty, and staff. Next, trustees are tasked with spanning the community and the campus,

³ Here, the term "executive" refers to the senior-most leader within the organization (e.g. executive director, president), while "manager" refers to the externally composed lay board to which the executive reports.

serving as a “bridge” and “buffer” that relates the institution to its community and society and protects the college from undue interference in its affairs. Finally, the board is responsible for the financial welfare for the institution, providing direction and policy on fiscal matters including the budget and endowment, among others areas.

There are other responsibilities that two of the three organizations explicitly assign to trustees. The Carnegie Commission (1973) and AGB (2010), for instance, align in their view that trustees are tasked with appointing, assessing, and removing, if necessary, the president. The AGB (2010) and AAUP (1966) affirm a board’s responsibility to leave to the administration and faculty the responsibility for day-to-day management of the college and the conduct of teaching and research, respectively. Notable also is how history and mission is embedded within a board’s responsibilities. The AAUP (1966) points to trustees’ “special obligation” to draw upon institutional history in the boards’ decision-making while the Carnegie Commission (1973) unequivocally describes the board as “a guardian of the mission.” Together these statements surface the idea that protection of some aspects of an institution is a condition of good trusteeship.

These broad governing board responsibilities cited above are evident throughout the normative literature. However, missing from the discussion on what trustees are responsible for—or should be responsible for—is an examination of trustees’ own views on their role at their respective institutions. On one hand, the abundance of literature on “good” trusteeship supports the view that trustees

have access to—and perhaps agree with—popular understandings of the trustee role. On the other hand, no two American colleges and universities are identical. What makes sense for trustees at one institution may not be suitable for trustees at a similar college or university. Furthermore, how trustees construe their responsibilities may bear on the board’s ability to fully leverage its capacity. Chait et al. (2005) for example, argue for a conception of effective non-profit governance as leadership, asserting that good boards operate in three modes: fiduciary, strategic, and generative. Yet absent any evidence that boards conceive of themselves as operating in even one of these modes, it is difficult to gauge the opportunities to transform boards to meet the governance-as-leadership model. Therefore, an exploration of trustees’ perceptions of their work is a distinct and important contribution to what we know—and can support with evidence—about American college trustees today.

Empirical Research and Higher Education Governance

A descriptive body of literature on trustees draws on data and theory in order to analyze trustees and boards in areas such as board-level and individual trustee characteristics and boards’ effect on institutions. In the higher education field, this empirically-based literature provides a rich description of the men and women who comprise trustee governing boards, exploring dimensions of the board in ways that motivate contemplation and hypotheses on whether and how trustee boards meet their governance responsibilities.

The literature includes a robust set of descriptive research, studies that extend back to the 1940's when Beck (1947) observed the expanding influence of higher education on American life. Using data from public records, the author set out to describe characteristics such as gender, age, and net taxable income that defined the trustee boards of "prominent" American universities (1947). Beck's (1947) work, and the studies that precede it⁴, laid the groundwork for later research that, for instance, examined students on trustee boards (Birnbaum & D'Heilly, 1971) and the level and kind of decisions that 4-year public boards engage with (Paltridge et al., 1973).

The picture of trustees and trustee boards has become more detailed. Gomberg & Atelsek (1977), and others (Schwartz & Akins, 2005; Fain, 2009; Schwartz & Bakerman, 2010), provide an increasingly nuanced description of trustees, boards, and their governance policies. Complementing these studies is work such as Michael et al. (1997) in which the ways in which trustees are appointed and educated are examined. Notably, a considerable amount of the available research on trustees is attributable to The Association of Governing Boards (AGB). The organization, describing itself as "the premier organization centered on governance in higher education" (Association of Governing Boards, 2015), annually surveys trustees and other campus constituents on trustee board composition as well as areas including trustees' oversight of educational quality

⁴ Counts (1927), McGrath (1936) and Nearing (1939) published studies that examined a narrower set of trustee board characteristics relative to Beck's (1947) research.

(Schwartz & Bakerman, 2010), the public's views on higher education vis-à-vis governing boards (Schwartz & Bakerman, 2012), and best practices and policies for college and university governance (Fain, 2009).

Other research from among the descriptive literature opens the door for greater understanding of the trustee role vis-à-vis their experience and decision-making. Wood (1985) for instance, interviews a trustee, the board chair, and the president from 10 private colleges, and develops a typology of trustee boards. She considers each of these board types (i.e., rubber stamp, corporate, and participatory) in the context of their responsibility for the president, arguing that the board's operating style corresponds with the obligation trustees feel to support the president. McLaughlin & Riesman (1990) explore more narrowly trustees and the president, pointing out the changing perception among campus constituents for transparency in the presidential appointment process. Their work sheds light on the decision-making challenges trustees faced—and face—as boards endeavored to balance process openness with process confidentiality.

Indeed, the appointment of the president, and boards' perceptions of their role in that process, may influence whether and how an institution changes aspects of its identity, a focus of this research. Kraatz & Moore (2002), for instance, examine liberal arts colleges' propensity to develop professional programs—a departure from more conservative definitions of liberal arts education. The authors find that colleges whose presidents arrive from institutions that offer professional programs, or from less prestigious colleges, are more likely to develop

professional programs. Absent from their design and analysis, however, is an investigation of the board's part in appointing these presidents and how trustees made sense of their decisions. Hartley & Schall (2005) likewise examine adaptation at private colleges⁵, considering mission evolution over time and the factors that influence it. Although they nod to the trustees' approval of certain key decisions, the authors do not attempt to unearth how trustees' understanding of their responsibility, including protection of their institutions' missions or identities, helped explain the directions that the sample institutions followed.

It seems inconceivable that how trustees perceive their role has no bearing on the direction of a college or university, including whether and how an institution changes over time. While Kaplan (2004) presents findings to argue that governance structures do not matter, the author does not examine the views of the focal trustees in order to assess they extent, if any, they explain the study outcomes. Meanwhile, Pusser & Turner (2004) point to an apparent convergence in what non-profit and for-profit colleges and universities do and how they generate revenue. The authors speculate on the impact of this convergence on governance structures, when, indeed, the phenomenon may be explained by changes in how trustees conceive of their responsibility. Notably, in a later study on board interlocks, Pusser and his co-authors (2006) acknowledge how future research on trustees' connections should explore the kinds of information that flow over networks. Indeed such an examination might reveal the transfer of views on

⁵ The focus of the authors' study is two private colleges, Swarthmore and Olivet.

trusteeship that, later, inform what trustee make of their responsibilities and how they make sense of their decisions.

Summary

The extant literature on trustee boards helps us understand board origins and legal rights; historical and popular conceptions of trustee responsibilities; trustee and board characteristics; and how trustees' views might inform decision making and change. However, important questions from the normative literature, concerning definitions of good governance and trustees' role in preserving and adapting an institution, have not been adequately addressed in the descriptive literature. Thus, the aim and contribution of my study is to apply empirical research methods to these concerns to better understand how trustees perceive their role.

Chapter 3: Research Design & Methods

This research is about trustees' perceptions of governance, and whether and when protection of the institution's mission and identity becomes a focus of trustees' attention. In this chapter, I detail the study's design and methods approach, including how I identified and recruited participants, and collected and analyzed data. I close by commenting on my status as an outsider and offer a reflection on the value of this study for the participating trustee board chairs.

Site and Participant Selection

Site Selection

College trustees are the focus of this research. I drew a sample of trustees from American colleges and universities that met three conditions. First, the institutions are private schools. Next, they retain a distinct mission or identity. Specifically, I selected institutions commonly identified as liberal arts, a historically black college or university (HBCU), a Catholic college, or a single sex institution⁶. Finally, each school focuses primarily on the undergraduate experience. For most of the institutions, this means that they offer undergraduate degrees only. Three of the schools are universities. However, their graduate programs are small, and take a backseat to undergraduate education. My choice of institutions with these characteristics is strategic. I narrowed the sites to private

⁶ I used IPEDS data to identify historically Black and liberal arts institutions. I obtained a list of Catholic colleges from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. For single-sex colleges, I used information gathered and made available by the College Board.

institutions for reasons related to transparency and authority. Open meeting laws arguably make it easier to study how boards of public institutions perceive trusteeship and engage with matters of mission and identity. However, shedding light on the views and decisions of private college trustees is more difficult. At private colleges, evidence of trustees' priorities is often only revealed in the form of decisions such as the appointment of a president or announcement of a capital campaign. Regarding authority, public trustee boards sit atop the institutions' organizational structure. However, unlike their private college peers, public college trustees often work in the shadow of the state. That is, the governor is responsible for appointing trustees among 77% of public colleges and universities (Schwartz & Bakerman, 2010). Accordingly, these trustees' perceptions of their role may be a function of an "invisible hand." Public higher education governance often also includes other layers such as state system boards that may reduce the authority of institutional boards of trustees. By contrast, private colleges appoint members through an internal process. Relative to public boards, private college trustees are commonly regarded as insulated from political influence, operating as the final authority within the institution.

I drew upon institutions with specific profiles—Catholic, HBCU, liberal arts, single-sex—because I am most interested in trustees' views on their institutions' missions and identities vis-à-vis changes in the higher education landscape that may force discussion of change to those missions or identities. The education philosophy (i.e., liberal arts) or student body profile (i.e., racial or

gender) of these colleges distinguishes the institutions from others that may share similar characteristics such as size or location. While all institutions bear some measure of distinction, I hypothesized that locating a research study among the selected institutions would increase the chances of discovering whether and when trustees discuss core changes to the college. Indeed, numerous news stories have explored the challenges facing single-sex, historically Black, Catholic, and liberal arts colleges (Feldman, 2014; Fischer, 2014; Kolowich, 2014; McMurtrie, 2014), providing me further assurance that trustee boards from these kinds of schools would have something to say about the future of their institutions as it relates to the students they serve or the institutions' approach to education.

Institutions at all levels, from community colleges to research universities, are facing challenges in the current higher education environment. Thus, I limited the pool of potential sites to primarily undergraduate institutions in order to focus on the concerns of those schools. Numerous undergraduate institutions had profiles that met the requirements for inclusion in this study, a fact that improved my confidence that I could obtain access to enough trustees to conduct a credible study. Although I cannot draw from my findings conclusions for the larger set of college trustees, my interviews may reveal themes or ideas that others should consider as they conduct research on trustees, or as we look broadly at the role trustee boards in higher education.

Participant Selection

Twenty-five trustees participated in this study; each individual is from an institution that meets the requirements I describe above. I chose to interview trustees primarily because very little of the research literature explores their views of their role at colleges and universities. By making trustees the focus of my study, I offer access to a little-known perspective—the trustees’ perspective—on college or university governance. Each participant is also the chair of his or her respective trustee board. For the purpose of this study, the chair is the most important position on the trustee board. He or she presides over meetings and, with the college president, sets the meeting agenda. The chair is the *de facto* interface between the board and the president, regularly engaging with the president on institutional matters outside of scheduled board meetings. As such, the chair is arguably the most active and engaged trustee on the board. Their trustee experience⁷ and access to information allow them to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the institution, including its mission and identity, as well as opportunities and challenges that face the organization. Therefore, the role of chair uniquely positions these men and women to provide insight into trusteeship in a changing environment, thus making them my choice for participants in this study.

In building my sample, I aimed for breadth over depth by recruiting board chairs from multiple institutions. This allowed me to gain insight into trusteeship at more institutions, and to compare the perspectives of the individuals with the

⁷ Board chairs are elected or appointed after serving one or more terms as a trustee.

most responsibility for the board's functioning. Importantly, this design decision—breadth over depth—may have also facilitated access to participants. I consulted with my doctoral advisors as I was designing this study, two of which have extensive professional and research experience with senior leaders in higher education and private industry. Each expressed concern about attempting to interview multiple trustees from the same institution. Specifically, they hypothesized that the college's president or board chair would refuse access to the board for fear that doing so might lead to leaks of sensitive information. They were right. Senior campus leaders that I spoke with, including college presidents and their chiefs of staffs, expressed unwillingness to encourage multiple trustees from their boards to participate in my study. However, these leaders were amenable to a study that drew upon a single trustee from their board.

I aimed for a sample size of 25 board chairs, following Charmaz's (2006, p.114) and Green & Thorogood's (2009, p.120) suggestions that samples of around 25 participants are generally sufficient for developing meaningful themes for useful interpretation. Indeed, I found that I began to routinely hear familiar themes as I neared my 20th interview. As important, this sample size made it possible to obtain multiple board chairs from each of the school profiles that I described above, allowing me to compare and contrast the views of multiple board chairs from one type of school with the views of board chairs from other school types.

Gaining Access and Recruiting Participants

Following a suggestion from my dissertation committee chair, I recruited participants with the help of each board chair's college president. The logic for taking this approach is simple: presidents have contact information for their chairs. We also hypothesized that the chair would be more likely to agree to participate in this research if the study had the imprimatur of the president. I began the recruitment process by preparing a list of institutions that met the site conditions described above. I then narrowed the set to include only New England institutions. Convenience and necessity motivated this choice. New England is home to a number of colleges that met my study conditions. I suspected that many of the board chairs for these institutions lived within the region and the Northeast, making an in-person interview, my preferred choice, more likely. I then added Historically Black Colleges to the list as none of these institutions reside in New England. The list of prospective institutions numbered 64.

I shared the recruitment list with two members of the higher education faculty at the Harvard Graduate School of Education: Dr. James Honan and Dr. Judith McLaughlin. Each had agreed to leverage their personal and professional networks in order to help me win the support of the colleges' presidents for my research. Dr. Honan and Dr. McLaughlin reviewed the list of prospective sites, selecting a total of 31 college presidents to whom they mailed a letter in late January. A generic copy of that letter is in Appendix B. The response to their missives was swift. Within a week of mailing the letter, several college presidents

responded, confirming whether or not their chairs would participate in the study. I followed up by phone and e-mail with the presidents who had not responded by the second week in February. Thus, by the end of that month, I had communicated with nearly all of the 31 individuals whom we originally contacted by postal mail.

I followed up by e-mail or phone with each board chair once his or her president had given permission to make contact. A sample of the follow up letter and consent form is in Appendix C. I had expected this phase, confirmation of participants' participation, to be long. However, trustees were generally responsive, returning my messages, and their signed consent forms, within days of my e-mail. I had secured approximately 20 trustees whom to participate in the study by the first week of March 2014 Through continued follow up calls, and by leveraging the personal networks of friends and former colleagues, I was able to secure an additional five trustee participants by the end of April.

Site Characteristics

The institutions in this study differ along several dimensions. I present in Table 1 summary statistics for the participating institutions⁸ to illustrate the diversity among these sites.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Private College Research Sites (2013-2014)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Proportion</u>
Identity Profile		
<i>Catholic Colleges</i>	4	0.16
<i>HBCUs</i>	4	0.16
<i>Liberal Arts Colleges</i>	9	0.36
<i>Single-Sex, Men</i>	2	0.08
<i>Single-Sex, Women</i>	6	0.24
Region		
<i>Great Lakes</i>	1	0.04
<i>Mid East</i>	1	0.04
<i>New England</i>	16	0.62
<i>Southeast</i>	6	0.23
<i>Southwest</i>	1	0.04
Board Size		
<i>Mean</i>	31	-
<i>Median</i>	31	-
<i>Min.</i>	21	-
<i>Max.</i>	45	-
Enrollment		
<i>Mean</i>	1,769	-
<i>Median</i>	1,705	-
<i>Min.</i>	315	-
<i>Max.</i>	3,607	-
Tuition Dependence		
<i>Mean</i>	54%	-
<i>Median</i>	54%	-
<i>Min.</i>	33%	-
<i>Max.</i>	77%	-
Admissions Selectivity		
<i>Mean</i>	57%	-
<i>Median</i>	63%	-
<i>Min.</i>	16%	-
<i>Max.</i>	97%	-

Sources: IPEDS Delta Cost Project Survey Data, 2010; The Princeton Review

Note: "Tuition Dependence" denotes the proportion of operating expenses covered by net tuition revenue. Net tuition revenue is the amount of revenue an institution takes in from tuition and fees, net of all institutional grant aid provided to students. Other possible sources of operating revenue include federal, state, and local appropriations, grants, and contracts; private gifts, grants, and contracts; sales and services of educational activities; auxiliary enterprises; and endowment earnings. "Admissions Selectivity" denotes the number of students admitted as a percentage of the number of students that applied to the institution.

⁸ I have disguised the names of the participants and the schools that they serve. I have also removed information that an astute reader might identify with a specific institution.

Of the sites in the sample, 16 (62%) are located in New England. Sites located in other regions are generally, but not exclusively, Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The mean undergraduate student body size for the set is 1,769; the institutions range in size from a minimum enrollment of 315 to a maximum of 3,607⁹. Size was not a condition for participation in the study, but it was a point of discussion among several participants who perceive the size of their institutions to be an important dimension of the college's identity.

I also collected data on institutions' admissions selectivity¹⁰ and tuition dependence¹¹. Money often matters in decision-making, and I wondered whether trustees' engagement with identity and change would vary depending on the institution's relative wealth. For instance, a trustee whose college draws all of its operating revenue from net tuition may experience greater pressure to diversify the college's revenue stream than a trustee whose college draws no revenue from tuition. A possible consequence is that trustees of a more tuition-dependent school may be more inclined to pursue money making opportunities that depart from its original mission or core identity. Similarly, an institution's willingness to consider changes to aspects of its mission or identity could vary according to its selectivity. Board members of a highly selective college may be less sensitive to changes in

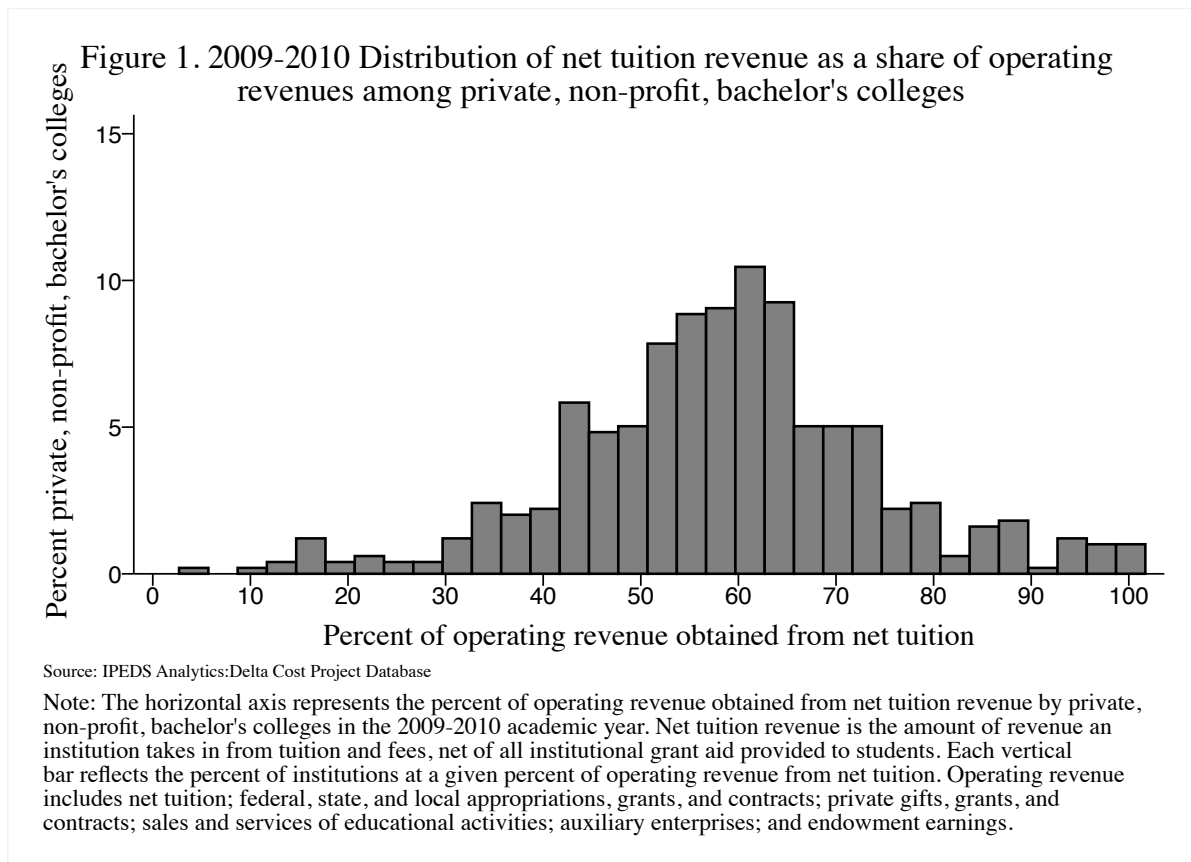
⁹ I obtained data on enrollment, tuition dependence, and admissions selectivity from the 2010 IPEDS Delta Data Cost Project.

¹⁰ Here, I define selectivity as the number of students admitted as a percentage of the number of students that applied to the institution.

¹¹ An institution's tuition dependence is defined as the proportion of operating expenses covered by net tuition revenue. Net tuition revenue is the amount of revenue an institution takes in from tuition and fees, net of all institutional grant aid provided to students. Other possible sources of operating revenue include federal, state, and local appropriations, grants, and contracts; private gifts, grants, and contracts; sales and services of educational activities; auxiliary enterprises; and endowment earnings.

the student market than trustees from an institution that admits nearly all of the students that apply¹².

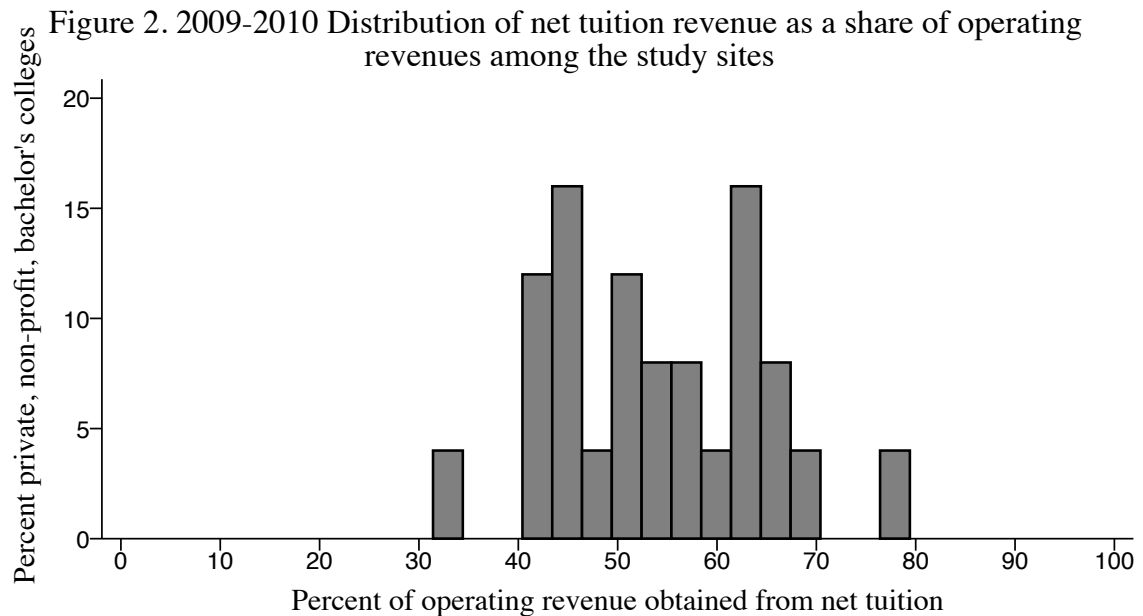
In Figure 1, I present the 2009-2010 distribution of net tuition revenue as a share of operating revenues among private, non-profit bachelor's colleges.



The figure illustrates how important tuition revenue is for the majority of these 497 institutions: 97% percent of the institutions draw 20% or more of their revenue from net tuition; 74% draw 50% or more of their revenue from net tuition.

In Figure 2, I present the distribution of net tuition revenue as a share of operating expenses for the institutions in my study.

¹² Another statistic to consider is the admissions yield, the proportion of admitted students who actually enroll at the college. These data, however, are not publicly available. I could have petitioned my research sites for this information, but that was unnecessary. The statistics on tuition dependence and admissions selectivity are sufficient for a comparison of the remarks among my participants.



Source: IPEDS Analytics:Delta Cost Project Database

Note: The horizontal axis represents the percent of operating revenue obtained from net tuition revenue by private, non-profit, bachelor's colleges in the 2009-2010 academic year. Net tuition revenue is the amount of revenue an institution takes in from tuition and fees, net of all institutional grant aid provided to students. Each vertical bar reflects the percent of institutions at a given percent of operating revenue from net tuition. Operating revenue includes net tuition; federal, state, and local appropriations, grants, and contracts; private gifts, grants, and contracts; sales and services of educational activities; auxiliary enterprises; and endowment earnings.

These institutions draw between 32% and 76% of their operating revenue from net tuition, a notable share. My research sites also vary in admissions selectivity.

With a mean value of 57%, the institutions range from a minimum of 19% to a maximum value of 79%. Of course, this selection of schools is not representative of private, bachelor's colleges in the United States. However, these sites suggest the diversity of the broader population of private colleges in this country.

Moreover, their differences on multiple dimensions grant me an opportunity to examine whether and how trustees' views align or differ according to the characteristics of their colleges.

Participant Characteristics

In Table 2, I present summary statistics for the sample of trustee board

Table 2. Summary Descriptive Statistics for the Sample of Private College Trustee Board Chairs (2014)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>National Average</u>
Constituency			
<i>Alumni</i>	14	56%	60%
Gender			
<i>Men</i>	18	72%	70.6%
<i>Women</i>	7	28%	29.3%
Occupation			
<i>Business</i>	19	76%	51.8%
<i>Education</i>	2	8%	13%
<i>Professional Services</i>	2	8%	23.1%
<i>Other</i>	2	8%	11.2%
Tenure - Board (Years)			
<5 years	3	12%	-
5 to 10 years	7	28%	-
>10 years	15	60%	-
Tenure - Board Chair (Years)			
<4 years	16	64%	-
4 to 6 years	7	28%	-
>6 years	2	8%	-

Source: Association of Governing Boards of Universities, and Colleges. (2010). Policies, practices, and composition of governing boards of independent colleges and universities, 2010. executive summary. Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

chairs. In Appendix E, I present descriptive statistics for the individual trustees in the study. Notable among the statistics in Table 2 is where my sample aligns with and differs from data on the profile of average private college trustees collected by the Association of Governing Boards (Schwartz & Bakerman, 2010). The sample and AGB data are remarkably similar along constituency and gender dimensions. Fifty-six percent of individuals in the sample are alumni of the college they serve

compared to 60% of trustees on an average-size private baccalaureate college board. Twenty-eight percent of the sample are women, roughly one percentage point less than the percentage of women on private college boards. A considerably larger share of the study sample, 76%, currently works in, or is retired from, the business profession. The corresponding statistic for peer institutions nationally is 52%. Just as striking is the small number—two each—of trustees in the sample that work in education, professional services, or other professions¹³. The remaining professional categories are tied at two individuals (8%) each. Finally, this group is made up of experienced trustees. Including their tenure as board chair, 60% of participants have served as a trustee for 10 years or more.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study come from 25 individual, semi-structured interviews with the board chairs discussed above. The interview protocol that I used is in Appendix E. I chose this approach because it seemed most suitable for addressing my research questions. Interviews, for example, allowed me to ask immediate follow up questions when the respondent gave answers that were vague or unclear. Interviewing also allowed me to probe for specific examples and interpretations of events or experiences. As Seidman (2006) points out, the interview method grants participants an opportunity to direct the conversation towards areas of importance

¹³ The Association of Governing Boards includes in “Professional Service” an individual who works as an accountant; attorney or legal professional; dentist, physician, or medical professional; and psychologist or mental health professional. The AGB includes in “Other” professions an individual who works as an artist, clergy, home manager, or government or nonprofit employee.

of which I would otherwise be unaware. Put another way, interviews allow a participant to tell his or her story (2006). To allow for this, I aimed to balance strict adherence to the interview protocol with a more relaxed structure that allowed me to pursue emergent topics. Indeed, trustees across the sample raised interesting topics that I did not broach in my interview questions. This typically happened once participants became more comfortable with me or recalled aspects of their experience that, to them, provided useful background or context. I also sought to structure the conversation in a way that would give the trustees a chance to share with me things that they wanted to discuss that we had not already talked about. The final question in the protocol asks trustees to share with me things that we had not discussed during our conversation.

I conducted 10 (40%) of the interviews in person. The others I conducted over the phone, generally using a landline conference phone at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This helped ensure high sound quality, and allowed me to take notes more easily during the discussion. In two cases, I had to rely on my personal mobile phone in order to conduct part or all of those interviews. During the design phase of this study, I planned to leverage video conferencing technology for the conversations that I could not conduct in person. However, leveraging this technology proved to be complicated and unnecessary. In nearly all cases, the landline call proved to be simple, efficient, and easy for my participants. On average, the conversations lasted about 55 minutes. They ranged in length from a minimum of 28 minutes to a maximum of 1 hour and 33 minutes.

Data Collection

During each interview, guided by the themes of the interview protocol, I listened for information that related to how the participant perceived good trusteeship, examples of conditions in which the institution's mission and identity were perceived to be threatened, and explanations for decisions that resulted in preserving—or adapting—the mission and identity. I prepared extensively for these conversations to facilitate rich data collection, drawing upon several sources of information about the individual, the institution, and governance at the college. As I explain below, the interviews represented my only data source; this limited opportunities to triangulate my findings with other sources. To address this constraint, I actively looked for opportunities to ask trustees about comments that contradicted or reinforced remarks they made earlier in the conversation.

I also leveraged what I had learned about each participant, their college, and governance there to better facilitate expression of trustees' actual views. For each trustee, I prepared a dossier of information. These typically included information I gathered from the institution's website such as the chair's biography and any public remarks the trustee made during his or her tenure. Occasions for these remarks included, for instance, commencement, the installation of a president, or the dedication of a building. I used executive profiles available on websites such as Businessweek.com to extend what I knew about the participants' educational and professional background as well as their past and current volunteer commitments. Taken together, this information provided insight into

participants' interests and experience—educational, professional, and volunteer—and, at times, provided some evidence of their views on their colleges' values, mission, or identity.

I collected information on each college's history and mission statement, typically available on an "About" or "History" page of the institution's website. In addition, I scanned the colleges' websites for evidence of activity at the institution that would lend itself to a discussion of the board's role in change and decision-making vis-à-vis mission and identity. I gathered any readily available material from the site for activity including a capital campaign launch, student protests, or the announcement of a president's resignation. My sense was that advance knowledge of these things would be useful examples when I asked trustees to recall specific occasions that concerned the institution's mission or identity. I also thought it was important to signal to participants that I valued their time, and came prepared to have a meaningful conversation about their views on trusteeship. Indeed, I hoped that my apparent knowledge of their schools' activities would limit their attempts to be vague when discussing matters that they may have viewed as sensitive.

Finally, from each school I gathered and analyzed one or more artifacts that shed light on the institutions' priorities and trustees' responsibilities. These materials included strategic plans, the board's website, trustee by-laws, and the charter for most of the institutions. This approach allowed me to juxtapose individual trustees' perception of their role with those held by the board itself.

Also, documentation of their responsibilities and prior knowledge of a board priority allowed me to probe for specific, detailed responses from interviewees. In some cases, I was able to use the artifacts I had collected to develop institution-specific questions that asked the trustee to comment on the message that these formal documents conveyed on the institution's priorities and what constitutes good trusteeship.

Data Analysis

With trustees' permission, I recorded interviews using an audio recorder. After each interview, I converted the recording to an audio file and secured it in several locations accessible only to me. I employed three individuals to transcribe the audio files¹⁴. Each agreed to use a near-verbatim approach, capturing every word that the interviewee uttered, but omitting fillers such as "um" and "uh," and multiple false starts. Several weeks passed before the transcripts were available for reading. I took advantage of this time by casually listening to each recording, making mental notes of interesting examples or phrases offered by the participants, and recording my experience with these interviews in a project memo. Once the transcripts were complete, I listened to the recordings again, following along in each transcript to ensure fidelity to the recording and to fill in areas that were unintelligible to the transcriber.

¹⁴ At the start of each interview, before I began recording, I explained to participants that I would be using a third-party transcription service to transcribe my recordings. I invited participants to refrain from using the names of their institutions in order to ensure each institution's anonymity.

My analysis objective was to use the data to build a set of codes that I would then refine and synthesize into a description of trustees' perceptions of trusteeship. I used NVivo qualitative research software to facilitate coding and analysis. The software allowed me to more quickly code the data, including capturing comments that were illustrative of the ideas reflected in my codes. NVivo also facilitated comparison of participants' comments, thereby allowing me to look for patterns among responses between trustees from different types of colleges.

I began my analysis by open coding five transcripts, one from each of the schools types I presented earlier: liberal arts, Historically Black, Catholic, and single sex¹⁵. Moving quickly through the data, I followed an inductive approach, looking for themes related to my research questions and pairing each line with a short, active phrase that I believed reflected what was happening in the data. Through this process, I was able to generate a set of general themes that informed development of a set of basic codes related to mission and identity, effective trusteeship, and change. A limitation of this approach, however, is that it was difficult to observe patterns or areas of divergence in participants' responses to specific questions when reading entire transcripts at a time. Thus, once I had open coded five transcripts, I organized my data by interview question, gathering, for instance, all participants' responses to question 2 into a single file. Thus, I was able to read each participant's response to the same question, and observe patterns

¹⁵ From this group, I selected two files. One was for a women's college; the other was for a men's college.

and themes that served as the basis for a set of question-specific codes. I drafted analytic memos throughout the coding process. These I used to reflect upon my codes, and to ask questions of the data and myself as I tried to discern what the data were telling me.

As I moved through each question, analyzing participants' responses to specific questions about identity and mission, I began generating longer memos. Here I began reflecting extensively on the relationship between the codes and what I thought the participants were telling me. Into these memos, I drew segments of transcripts that illustrated the concepts, ideas, or perceptions I was trying to understand. I revisited my existing codes, refining them and generating new codes as necessary. It was during this time that I began to look for examples of convergence and divergence across types of colleges. This iterative process—reading transcripts, coding data, drafting memos, re-coding data, drafting memos—opened my eyes to themes that reflected an overarching story for my data from the perspective of my participants.

Although my approach to coding and analysis provided insight into trustees' perceptions, it was not without its limitations. Specifically, a member of my interpretive community pointed out that my strategy for organizing the data for coding removed informants' comments from a larger context. By removing informants' responses from the larger conversation, I was limiting my ability to observe how some of their views were in evidence throughout the interview, and how their responses were informed by their view of their institution. With this in

mind, I revisited each transcript, and juxtaposed the data against the codes I developed using the approach described above. In this way, I was able to draw into my codes relevant data from across the interviews. When I completed this process, effectively re-reading and analyzing each transcript, I turned my attention to the codes themselves, reviewing and revising the data therein, creating new, more refined codes as necessary, and organizing the entire set into a more coherent whole that informed how I would describe and present trustees' perceptions on change and trusteeship.

Defining Terms: Mission and Identity

As I spell out at the beginning of this chapter, this study is about trustees' perceptions of "good" governance. This research is also about whether and when trustees engage with change to a college's identity, the fundamental aspect of the institution for which it is best known and that may distinguish it from other colleges. In this study, I primarily define the institution's identity as the well-established category group for which each college in the study was selected: Catholic, HBCU, liberal arts, or single-sex. Thus my aim is to understand, for example, whether and when trustees from a single-sex college discuss becoming co-ed. However, I also define identity as the aspect (or aspects) that trustees perceive to be fundamental to the institution. Thus I leave open the possibility that my view of an institution's identity does not align with trustees' views.

In the interview protocol, I use multiple questions to elicit trustees' views on their colleges' identities. In one such question, I ask participants to share their perception of the college's mission. In this study, "identity" and "mission" are not synonymous. However, in my conversations with participants, I used each word with the same intention: to uncover aspects of an institution which, if changed, would represent in trustees' minds a significant change in what the college is or does. In order to maintain consistency throughout my interviews, I always referenced mission and identity when asking them to reflect on core aspects of the college, including times when they discussed change to those aspects. Thus whether and how I use the words in the presentation of my findings is a reflection of trustees' own usage during our conversation.

Validity and Study Limitations

To support the validity of my findings, I attempted to address potential biases—my prior work in higher education; my service as a board member for two non-profits organizations—that I imagined might affect how I interpreted what trustees told me. I employed several "tests" that Maxwell (2005) identifies as useful to supporting the validity of a qualitative study's conclusions. First, I reviewed multiple times the verbatim transcripts of my conversations with informants throughout the coding, analysis, and writing phase of this study. These transcripts allowed me to avoid relying on my recollection or hastily jotted notes for what exactly trustees said. I also followed up with several participants by e-

mail and phone whenever I needed to clarify a statement they made or to ask further questions about their views.

Next, I solicited feedback on my analysis and conclusions from my advisor, Dr. Judith McLaughlin, and two doctoral students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education with whom I had consulted for ideas and support in designing and executing a qualitative research study. These colleagues, my interpretive community, brought different levels of higher education governance expertise and familiarity with my research to this process. Their feedback, together with that provided by my remaining committee members, granted me an outsider's view of my interpretations. The questions they raised forced me to clarify my arguments on trustees' views on trusteeship as well as to provide evidence for the conclusions I drew.

Study Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations to my research findings. To start, the conclusions that I have drawn about trustees' perceptions of trusteeship are not generalizable. My sample is not representative of the population of private college trustees, and certainly does not reflect the population of board chairs across the various types of institutions that comprise American higher education. However, trustees from the wider population may share the views that my informants express. Indeed, many of the topics that my participants raised—rising cost of higher education, presidential transitions, the rise of education technology—are

relevant to many U.S. institutions. As such, my findings offer a glimpse into higher education governance that conceivably extends beyond my sample of 25 individuals.

It is also important to note that my informants may not have been completely forthcoming in their observations about their role, their institutions' mission and identity, and change at the colleges. Among other implicit roles, trustees are tasked with helping manage an institution's risk. It is conceivable that my informants, as risk managers, exercised great discretion in whether and how they responded to my interview questions. Even during those moments where trustees shared details about board disagreement or dysfunction, I do not know if my participants were sharing the whole story or simply enough to give the appearance of being open and fully cooperative. Outside of their role as trustees, these individuals are very accomplished professionals, frequently serving—or having served—at very high levels within their respective industries. Their professional success probably comes, in part, from great intellect, judgment, and political savvy. It seems unlikely that individuals with these qualities would inadvertently reveal information that would put themselves or the institutions they represent at risk. While I was excited and grateful for their apparent willingness to grant me a peek behind the curtain of college governance, I suspect that they showed me only what they wanted me to see. Their discretion has implications for my findings. The decision-making stories they chose to share influenced my view of trustees as protectors or adaptors of an institution's identity. Trustees may have

chosen stories with featured a process or outcome that is inconsistent with how they ordinarily work or vote.

Under different circumstances, I might have been able to triangulate my interview data with other sources. In this case, however, my options for comparing what trustees told me with other data were limited. Institutional charters and trustee by-laws detail a corporation's legal rights or spell out rules on meeting frequency and board size, but these documents do not reflect trustees' views on these aspects of their role. The Association of Governing Boards and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni frequently publish original research on trustee boards. However, these reports typically concern board characteristics (e.g., size, racial diversity, etc.) or public perceptions of trustees. These sources provide useful context, but are not data against which I can compare the views I have collected from individual trustees. Board meeting minutes could provide insight into how trustees view their role. However, unlike many public institutions, private college boards are not subject to open meeting laws that would make such meeting data available. The minutes from these institutions' board meetings remain strictly confidential.

Finally, I can only present my findings as the views of individual trustees, not those of an entire board. In their 2005 article, Khurana and Pick argue that a board of directors is not an aggregation of individuals. Rather, a board is a complex social system whose behavior and decisions must be understood as such. That is, a board's actions reflect the "sum of connections and relationships of a

group,” (pp. 1260) not the sum of individual board members behavior (2005).

Therefore, research that aims to understand board decision-making must use the board as the unit of analysis, not the individual. For my research this means that an informant’s view on the board’s role, including its responsibilities for mission and identity, cannot be said to reflect the board’s view on these matters. Specifically, I cannot claim that a single trustee’s view on trusteeship explains why a board makes or made certain decisions, even if that single view comes from the board chair—an individual with conceivably greater influence on the board and its agenda than any other trustee.

Outsider Status & Reflections on Research

Outsider Status

Throughout the design and execution of this study, I was very aware of, and sensitive to, my status as an outsider. Although I had obtained the approval of each institution’s president to conduct this study, I sensed that several conditions might limit the extent to which informants would feel comfortable speaking candidly about their views on trusteeship and change at their institution. I am not an alumnus of any of the research sites, nor have I worked at any of these colleges; so I did not have the benefit of even a perception of loyalty that may have put the chair from those schools at ease about the motivations for my research. Thus, I imagined that participants would be acutely concerned about how I would treat sensitive information, in particular, how I would disguise the individual and

institution so as not to reveal potentially damaging information. I endeavored to pre-empt any anxiety related to confidentiality by first confirming my commitment to disguising names and places in my introduction letter to the president. I followed this effort with a consent form to the prospective informants. There, I spelled out in detail the steps by which I would protect the participating individuals and institutions from being revealed. Of course, it is not unusual in interview research to assure informants that you will remove identifying information for the participating individuals and organizations. However, as an outsider to these organizations, I felt that it was essential to offer this assurance, to do so frequently, and to do it in writing in order to signal my commitment to the sanctity of our conversations.

Once I met each informant—face-to-face or via telephone—I continued my efforts to signal my gratitude and affirm my commitment to protecting their identities by reading, prior to starting the recording device, a set of “housekeeping rules.”¹⁶ Here I re-stated the purpose of the research, my hope for an open and candid conversation, and the steps that I would take to ensure that readers could not discern the individuals or their institution. My efforts were apparently successful in winning their confidence, or I may have overstated the skepticism I assumed informants would exhibit due to my role as an outside researcher. In any case, at no time did a participant ask me to offer additional assurance that I would disguise them or the institution. On two occasions, informants paused mid-

¹⁶ I present detail of these “rules” in Appendix F.

sentence to suggest that I change several details of their answers in order to better disguise their college. However, they did not refrain from telling the story. Indeed, in some cases informants shared such detailed information that I wondered whether and how I could keep relevant aspects of the comments without betraying the institution's identity.

My sense of being an outsider and a "guest" also motivated me to be diligent in keeping our conversations to within the time I had requested: one hour. I did this by assuring participants that I would be monitoring the time throughout our conversation, thereby relieving them of the need to do so. Again, my aim here was to engender greater trust by keeping my word. In doing so, I had hoped that participants would view me as a thorough professional to whom they could fully reveal their views. I was also sensitive to the fact that keeping our conversation to within one hour might also improve the chances that informants would agree to speak again if I needed to clarify a comment they made or to gather additional information. Importantly, I did not cut participants short during their answers or otherwise rush through questions in order to keep our conversations brief. Instead, I offered a time update after about 45 minutes had passed, sharing with them the number of questions that remained, and asking, when necessary, if it would be possible to extend our conversation an additional five minutes. In those cases, the answer was always "yes," and on several occasions informants pre-empted my request by alerting me that they had as much time as was needed to complete the interview.

Overall, I felt as though the trustees in my sample treated me with a measure of familiarity, trust, and, at times, deference, that I did not expect. To start, their affirmative responses to participate in my study arrived much faster than what I had imagined of individuals who bear a number of other obligations, including family, work, and volunteer responsibilities. That is, contacting and scheduling appointments with each informant was incredibly easy. Moreover, with only two exceptions, I never had to reschedule an interview due to changes in a board chair's schedule. Most notably, many trustees expressed agreement with my study topic and enthusiasm at the opportunity to participate.

Trustees also showed great faith in my promise to disguise their identities along with that of their respective institutions. Several informants casually waved me off when I verbally expressed my commitment, nodding their heads as if to say, "It's fine. I'm not worried about it." One participant even suggested that I reveal the names of the participating institutions in order to illustrate the diversity among my research sites. Finally, informants frequently responded to my questions with what I viewed as a high level of openness and specificity. In only one case did an informant appear to be intentionally vague in his responses even after I solicited more information in my follow-up questions. As I point out above, it is possible that what I perceived as their trust in me may have actually been their careful managing of our interaction to give that impression. This is an inherent risk in any interview-based research. Although my informants' may have withheld important information relevant to my research questions, the data that the chairs

did provide proved useful, and, I believe, made this a worthwhile research endeavor.

Study Reflections

I detail above the steps I took to identify and recruits board chairs to participate in my study, including contacting the prospective site's president to solicit their support for this research and help in securing their board chair's participation. This process reflects my and my advisor's view on how to gain access to these higher education elites. However gaining access to these men and women did not assure their participation. The president's approval, though helpful, was not itself a forcing function. Indeed, the chair of one college's board turned down my offer to participate despite the president's great enthusiasm in having the trustee participate. Unfortunately, it was not clear to me that there was a tangible incentive that I could offer to compel trustees' interest and participation. Indeed, in my consent form, I could only suggest as a possible benefit the satisfaction of telling their story. And, yet, 25 of the 26 board chairs whose help I solicited agreed to participate. Why?

As I reflect on my experience with these men and women, several possibilities emerge that might explain trustees' willingness to be a part of this study. One is that the chairs viewed my interview request as part of their job responsibilities: representing the institution to the public. As such, speaking with me would be akin to, for example, being asked by the president to attend a

community meeting on the institution's plans to expand its footprint in the surrounding neighborhoods. However, a conversation with me would entail not only talking about the college, but also its board of trustees. Prospective informants might have believed that it was their duty alone to have such a discussion. Board chairs might have also imagined that certain benefits might accrue to their college if they participated in the study. Specifically, informants may have expected to learn more about how colleges today, particularly their peer institutions, are responding to changes such as a declining college-age population in certain geographic regions. However, this seems unlikely. I never suggested to participants that our conversation would be an opportunity for them to learn more about how colleges were responding to change. More tellingly, at no time did an informant ask how other trustees responded to my questions.

The explanation that I find most intriguing occurred to me after interviewing the chair of a selective, liberal arts institution. Not long after our conversation, the chair e-mailed me to solicit my opinion on a letter that he had drafted. In it, he invites trustees from a set of select institutions to join him in a discussion about the role of trustees in helping set the strategic direction of an institution in the face of mounting challenges to higher education. What I realized then was that college trustee board chairs may not see themselves as having peers with whom to consult or share their experience. Much is made of the loneliness at the top of the college administration pyramid. College presidents are sometimes perceived as solely bearing the burden of the future welfare of the institution with

no one to guide or console them during difficult times. That view has merit, but it is not entirely true. First, as I point out in this study, and as a review of any private college's charter will attest, the board is ultimately responsible for the long-term welfare of an institution. While the daily execution of this responsibility falls on the president and his or her team, the board is no less accountable for the institution's success. Next, conceivably, during times of great challenge and distress, the president can turn to the board chair for support. Indeed, several board chairs in my study discuss how frequently they communicate with the president, illustrating these individuals' sense of responsibility for the college. But to whom does the board chair turn when he or she is at a loss for what to do? In view of some of the mission and identity changes under consideration by trustee boards from my research sites, it seems that serving as a trustee board chair is arguably the most challenging role that an individual can play in American higher education today. And yet college boards, and their chairs, remain obscure relative to the president and her leadership team, at once offering the board the freedom to operate free from public oversight or scrutiny and the burden of having to manage these complex, critically important institutions in relative isolation. Participating in this study may have been a way for them to share their concerns and joys without fear of judgment or other negative consequence.

Chapter 4. Findings on Trustee Responsibilities

This study was motivated by my interest in institutional change, and the role that trustees play in facilitating or forestalling that change. Among the things I was interested in discovering was trustees' views on their role and responsibilities, and whether and how preservation or adaptation of a college's mission and identity figured into those responsibilities. In the following chapter, I present my trustees' views on their role. What I discovered is that participants' conceptions of trusteeship align neatly with the responsibilities that are frequently documented in the legal and prescriptive literatures. Participants also comment on two qualities—being present and engaged and respect for the board's process and culture—that are marks of a good trusteeship.

The Fiduciary

Trustees in this study view themselves as stewards of an endless institution. They expressed their fiduciary responsibility more so than any other role that a good trustee must play. Their interpretations of the fiduciary responsibility differed, but Isabelle and Wes both point to an obligation to ensure the institution's "quality" and "sustainability." Trustees across the institutions similarly view themselves as tasked with protecting those elements. Some reference financial and administrative oversight as the levers by which to promote the near-term and future functioning of the college. Ellyn, for example, opines that the "fiduciary responsibility [is] to ensure sound management and financial

management practices” (personal communication, April 11, 2015). Alex takes a similar view of his role, explaining the financial aspect of being a fiduciary thus:

Well, as a board obviously your obligation is to the institution partly as a fiduciary so financially you want to make sure that the college is doing what it needs to do to continue its function and its mission and its educational goals (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Other trustees speak in more general terms about being a fiduciary, commenting on the long-term view that trustees are tasked with taking. Sylvia illustrates this view as follows:

Certainly, you are there to ensure the—I can think of the word in French!¹⁷—the perennial aspect of the institution. That it will go on forever. You’re responsible for that institution’s survival long, long into the future. And that is, I think, any trustee’s job: to think about the long-term implications of what you’re doing because you want that institution to survive, and people have given money to that institution in perpetuity that it may survive (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Robert, agrees, noting that trustees are singularly tasked with contemplating the college’s future, a “luxury” and “responsibility” that, presumably, is present in his mind as he weighs each decision he and the board makes for the college:

...you know, obviously the board is the lone body that thinks about the continuity of [the college] beyond the next ten years; beyond the next twenty-five or thirty years. You know, our timeframe is very different than the president's, than the students—certainly the students who have a four-year timeframe—or our faculty, so we have that luxury and that responsibility both (personal communication, April 2, 2015).

¹⁷ Sylvia later recalls that the word is “*pérennité*.”

The Policy Setter

Notwithstanding variation in how precisely trustees' view their fiduciary responsibility, participants share a common perception that near and long-term care of the institution is the foundation of that responsibility. In general, trustees further agree that fulfillment of the fiduciary role is accomplished in part by restricting themselves to the work of setting broad college policy. Leonard explains this idea thus:

...it's important for board members to remember that their role is to provide policy direction, guidance, help set priorities, but they are not there to manage the institution, to manage programs, but, as I said earlier, to simply stay in their lane. I think there's a tendency in my experience at a small institution, the line can get blurred if you're not careful (personal communication, May 22, 2015).

Wes echoes this sentiment, recalling a visit to his college's campus when students urged him and the board to take action on an issue:

I made a special trip and spent the day with the student executive board and the student association so that—these guys say, “We want to talk to the trustees about...” —I don't know...something—Let's say some food. “We don't want bottled water on campus anymore. I want to talk to the trustees.” And I get up in front of the whole group ...and I say to them, “I have no idea if there's any bottled water on campus. What I do is I hire the president. He runs the college....” They say, “Well, don't you think....” I said, “It doesn't make any difference what I think about bottled water. It's not my job. I don't manage the school” (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

Wes and others' comments support the notion—often advanced in the normative literature—that broad policy setting, not daily management, is a quality of good trusteeship. However, some trustees point out that staying in the broad policy lane can sometimes be a condition of poor trusteeship. Indeed, these participants

expressed no reservations about departing from the idealized broad policy-setting responsibility when the need arises. Andrew recalls an early board experience in which the board was struggling to cope with fiscal issues left behind by a president who had “mal-administered aspects of how the college should be operating:”

...when you go through that phase as a trustee—though you like to stay at the policy setting level at the college—if there is trouble in River City, well guess what, you go from ten thousand feet to one foot pretty quickly. And there were a number of us on the board who had to apply their own technical skills to help the college work itself through. So there was many periods of time during the first half of my trusteeship which it wasn’t about looking ten or fifteen years in the future, twenty years in the future. It was about the here and the now. It’s about cleaning up balance sheets. It’s about putting controls in place. It was about repairing relationships, and even at the board itself we had to look at ourselves (personal communication, March 21, 2015).

Often described, or decried, as “getting in the weeds,” the governance approach that Andrew and other trustees described to me contradicts the more simplistic view that good governance is characterized by avoiding the urge to manage administrative aspects of the college. Importantly, Andrew’s board engaged in the actions above in order to ensure the college’s quality and sustainability, a duty for which trustees’ accept responsibility. His views on trusteeship do not contradict popular sentiment. Rather, they reveal the complexities of good governance that may not be apparent in common prescriptions for what trustees do.

Serving as a Bridge and a Buffer

According to study participants, trusteeship entails looking into the campus and outside to the world, urging the college away from insularity, delivering to the

institution information and resources, and guarding against external forces that might undermine the college's functioning. Trustees describe this responsibility in terms of advocacy and ambassadorship—a leveraging of experiences and interactions with others in order to advance the college's interests. Chad summarizes informants' perspectives on the role of the trustee as a bridge and buffer, offering examples for how trustees can leverage outside world experience for the good of a college:

We expect you to be an advocate for the university. So when you're in social settings whether in the community or your place of work or wherever you might be.... Be aware of and be a part of the industry that you're now part of.... And don't just think [about] our university or college. Gain as much knowledge as you can about the broader context. We subscribe to the AGB publications, et cetera. Read up! Be aware about what's going on at other institutions. If you're a parent and you got children going to other places, be particularly aware of what's happening there so we can do some benchmarking and understand (personal communication, March 19, 2015).

Edward, an HBCU board chair, expresses a similar but distinct view, underscoring the importance of knowing the college and the world in order to more effectively represent the institution to society, and protect the college from forces that may seek to hasten its demise.

A good trustee becomes fully knowledgeable about the institution; has to be realistic about the pressures that we are under. Particularly as a historically black college, we have to know the environment in which we live. We have to know the politics. We have to know those forces that are supportive, and we have to know those forces that are not supportive.... And so we're fighting old battles and we're fighting new battles. And one must know the political environment, the social environment in which we exist (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Chad and Edward's place a premium on understanding the institution and the environment – a view that is evident among all other trustees in the sample. My conversations with trustees revealed how these individuals have become experts on their institutions and students of higher education. They are aware of changes in the outside world that stand to affect their institutions and, as I will show later, endeavor to respond to these changes in ways that are informed by trustees' understanding of their institutions' distinct needs and challenges. Put another way, these men and women seem acutely aware of what is going on in the world, and how those things may impact their college. Trustees expressed feelings of humility and honor when they recounted being invited to the board. However, they do not give the impression that these roles are honorific. Their descriptions of the challenges and opportunities their institutions face—along with the colleges' potential responses—instead suggest that these volunteers are engaged with real work.

The President

The trustee literature often describes the hiring of a president as one of the most tangible and important tasks a board will undertake. Many trustees in the sample share this view. Kimberly describes the responsibility for selecting the president as “one of the most important things that the trustees do” (personal communication, April 4, 2015). Marlin agrees, describing his board's search for a

new chief executive as “probably the most important thing that any board would ever do” (personal communication, March 13, 2015). However, participants also go further, describing their role as more than hiring or firing the president. Chad summarizes this view, observing that, “we have another responsibility as a board, and that is to do our best to help the president be successful....” (personal communication, March 19, 2015). Other trustees share this perception, painting a picture of good trusteeship as providing active and ongoing support for the president for the sake of that individual and the institution. Gary offers his view on the board’s relationship with the president, describing the task his trustees must undertake:

Our goals [sic.] is to make sure she has everything: every piece that she could have to make her a better president. And we should be doing everything we can to make her better. No one is going to walk into these jobs and be perfect. I don’t care how good they are. They need to be better (personal communication, April 1, 2015).

Richard agrees, alluding to the negative consequences that can occur when a board neglects to support the college’s president:

Now she’s not going to get everything she wants, but, by the way, if she doesn’t have a board that’s supporting her—particularly if she’s having to go out and face down our faculty—then there’s no way. And so I’m very clear, and I’ve had on several occasions had to step in and say, “We are going to get this thing done because our president wants it done.” At the end of the day, she is running the college, not us (personal communication, May 12, 2015).

Todd takes an even firmer view. Below he asserts that supporting the president, most notably during periods of change, must take the form of protecting the chief executive from constituents who may oppose disruption of the status quo:

When we hired our president, he was hired with the moniker of being a change agent.... But if you've hired somebody to be a change agent, the board really almost needs to take a blood oath to protect the president because there will be unhappiness from the faculty, from the students, and ultimately, that will impact the alumni (personal communication, April 9, 2015).

Earlier I presented trustees' views on policy setting, pointing out that the standard for good governance extolled by the literature does not always reflect the reality of trusteeship. That is, trustees asserted that good governance sometimes means taking a more managerial approach to trusteeship. Trustees' comments on their responsibility for the president similarly demonstrate how popular conceptions of what trustees do may understate the scope of their role. Trustees like Todd, Richard, and Gary paint a picture of trusteeship that reveals trustees' relationship to the president to be more dynamic and layered than descriptions that characterize trustee work as merely, appointing, evaluating, and firing the president. Supporting a president's professional development; standing behind a leader's their ideas and initiatives: these things represent good work in the minds of these trustees.

Time, Talent, and Treasure

"Time, Talent, and Treasure" is a phrase sometimes used to succinctly describe a trustee's responsibilities; all trustees referenced at least one aspect of

this truism. Andrew, for example, alludes to treasure, pointing out that “philanthropy comes in the form of me writing a check, but it also comes in me being an ambassador to the school to bring talent and resources to the school” (personal communication, March 21, 2015). Ellyn meanwhile raises the importance of also leveraging one’s talent on a trustee board: “The trustees have a responsibility to provide experience and expertise to whatever initiative is at hand that the College is dealing with, and a trustee has a responsibility to provide financial support” (personal communication, April 11, 2015). Notably, several participants referenced “time, talent, and treasure” to express their views of a trustee’s responsibility. For instance, Chad notes “I think that every trustee pretty much knows that **time, talent, and treasure** [emphasis added] are important aspects at the institution I’m part of. And I would say virtually every board I’m familiar with at the college level would be similar” (personal communication, March 19, 2015). Marlin agrees, observing, “[Trustee responsibilities are] pretty well determined by—you know, you hear the terms ‘**worth, love, and wisdom**’ or ‘**time, talent, and treasure**’ [emphasis added]. And I think they’re pretty much summed up by those three” (personal communication, March 13, 2015). Nancy goes further, spelling out how this adage is put into practice:

Well I don’t want to be cliché here, but the old **time, talent, and treasure** [emphasis added] adage I think really applies. First is “time.” To be a trustee at a college you really have to be willing to drop what your outside activities are and really focus on the college.... “Talent” is bringing your expertise to the table. So, if you’re a financial executive, make sure that you’re involved on the finance committee, that you’re bringing your expertise on best practices from your business to the college... “Talent” is

making sure that you speak up even if you feel you're in the minority.... And then "treasure." I really think it's mandatory that if you are on a board of trustees that that institution is either one, two, or three in your top philanthropic priorities (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

One thing that stands out about trustees' perceptions of their responsibilities in terms of time, talent, and treasure is that these more practical aspects—central to a trustees' work—are generally absent from more formal descriptions of trusteeship. Note, for instance, that these aspects of trusteeship are not spelled out in the AAUP (1966), Carnegie Commission (1973), or AGB (2010) conceptions of trusteeship in Appendix A. Yet, as Nancy argues above, this truism is essential to fulfilling all other trustee responsibilities. Put another way, according to trustees, serving as an institution's fiduciary is conditional upon an individual's willingness and ability to bring his or her personal resources of time, human capital, and philanthropy to bear in support of the institution. This view is an articulation of values that has consequences for the kind of men and women boards seek to recruit and appoint.

Show Up. Respecting the Culture.

While trustees cited time, talent, and treasure to be essential responsibilities of the role, several trustees pointed out that bringing these aspects to bear did not make someone a good trustee by definition. Indeed, many participants offered clear examples of behaviors characteristic of good trustees. Chad, for instance,

describes as “good hygiene aspects” the qualities of person that compel a trustee to be more present and engaged in his or her work:

The hygiene aspects are if you have agreed to be a trustee we expect you to come to the meetings. We expect you to show up on time. We expect you to be in the room with your mind and your heart and your soul while you’re in the room itself and not working on something else (personal communication, March 19, 2015).

Brandi offers a similar view, underscoring the active nature of her board and the importance of engagement to accomplishing the group’s work:

But I do want you to bring your expertise and your behaviors—what I call board behaviors—of good listening and interaction and engagement and inquiry and discourse to the board meetings because in our case our board meetings are extremely interactive. They’re not a report out.... So I really want an engaged board member (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Ellyn’s comment further illustrates the idea that a good trustee is an engaged trustee: “First and foremost, a good trustee participates.... So by participating, they’ll learn that obviously their involvement is critical. We’re not looking for people to be trustees in name only” (personal communication, April 11, 2015).

Edward agrees, but argues that, among HBCU’s, good trusteeship requires a “commitment above and beyond what one might find in other places, on other boards, and in industry and otherwise where the question of the existence of the organization has never been a question” (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

However, Marlin takes the view that across all types of institutions, good trusteeship—passionate, informed, hardworking, engaged—is the engine that drives progress in colleges today:

I think I look for people who are willing to roll their sleeves up and work and help with the work—who are engaged. Get very engaged. Get passionate about the institution.... And more than anything it's engagement. People must be engaged. They've got to show up. They've got to work. They've got to add their talent and skill to the pot, and at the end of the day that's how work gets done well in higher educational institutions among the board (personal communication, March 13, 2015).

What I also discovered is that trustees in this study place a premium on the way that the board conducts its work. That is, participants expressed views that reveal how important respect for the board's norms and culture is a condition of good trusteeship. Alex, for instance, also lays out how things work on his board, encouraging full participation while urging respect for the board's norms:

And I'll ask you to please be respectful of how the board functions and taking time to learn and see how it functions and to certainly be true to yourself in terms of speaking your mind and speaking freely, but also being respectful of others and the board on how it functions so that you don't jump in and over extend yourself too soon only to be surprised by the pushback that you may get because you may be speaking out of turn (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Leonard takes a similar view, instructing trustees to respect the way the board conducts its work. When I asked him how he would describe good trusteeship to a new member of the board, he replied as follows:

I would tell them to not be so quick to commit to bring things to the board that are presented by a student but to make sure that they tell the student or anyone—faculty, administration—that we have protocols and processes, including committees, to work through the issues before those are presented to the board (personal communication, May 22, 2015).

Glen goes further, unequivocally enjoining new members to fit into the way in which the board gets things done:

There's a culture that exists among the board, and don't try to alter that culture. See if you can fit within it. Certainly, every board has ways that they can improve, and we do have an annual introspective look at ourselves as a board of trustees, and that would be the opportunity to bring out ways that we can improve ourselves. And so we'd like for you to fit into that board culture (personal communication, April 3, 2015).

These and other comments seem to create a tension in the trustee role, namely among newer members of a board. On one hand, it is clear that participants value interested and engaged individuals who are ready and willing to commit to the work of governance. On the other hand, board chairs seem to also urge some measure of restraint in participation, asking new members to respect the board's process and culture—that is, the way things are done—as they transition in to the new role. As Leonard points out, there are often practical reasons for developing a sense of how things work and respecting the culture and process—reasons related to efficiency and effectiveness. On the other hand, these comments on honoring culture and process seem to reflect also a measure of board insularity or resistance to change that could prove detrimental to the institution.

Summary

Board chairs in this study express views on their roles and responsibility that reflect definitions of trustee work set forth in the legal and normative literatures. Trustees view themselves as fiduciaries, sharing the perception that the board and its individual members are responsible for the quality and sustainability of the college or university. While participants' ideas on how those aims are met

sometimes differed, trustees agreed that the board's role is to take a policy-setting approach to governance. Assigning the actual management and administration of the institution to the president, one trustee opines that a good trustee knows how to "stay in his lane." However, other trustees point to occasions when hands-on leadership is essential to fulfilling the fiduciary responsibility, adding nuance to the simpler view that good trusteeship means keeping hands off of administration.

Trustees also talked about the role they play as ambassadors and advocates for their colleges. As bridges to the outside world, trustees endeavor to guard against their colleges' insularity. As buffers against society, these men and women look to protect their institution's interests against forces that may seek to hasten the college's demise. Consistent also with the literature is participants' view of their responsibility for the president. Described by some trustees as the most important and tangible role the board will play, participants affirm their duty to appoint the president. Several participants go further, elaborating upon the importance of supporting—and protecting—the president, particularly during periods of change.

Interviews revealed that the adage "Time, Talent, and Treasure" is a fitting summary of a trustees' responsibility. Several trustees raise different aspects of this phrase as they reflected upon their responsibility for their respective colleges. Others used the phrase itself to explain what a trustee does. Notably, when invited to specifically reflect upon the qualities of a good trustee, participants overwhelmingly pointed to fulfillment of the time, talent, treasure responsibility,

describing as “good hygiene” or “good board behaviors” things such as showing up and being fully engaged in the work of the board. Board chairs also cited respect for the board’s norms and culture as a condition of good trusteeship, inviting new members in particular to participate in the work of the board while urging them to respect the way things are done.

This study is about trustees’ perceptions of trusteeship, including whether and when they discuss change to their institutions’ missions and identities. In their comments above, trustees do not specifically name change management as a trustee responsibility. However, their perceptions of their duties—particularly as fiduciaries, policy setters, and appointers of the president—support the notion that trustees play a role in managing change at their institutions. In the following chapters, I will explore this idea further, inviting participants to express their view of their institution’s identity (Chapter 5), their responsibility for that identity (Chapter 6), and how they make sense of efforts to adapt or preserve the identity (Chapter 7).

Chapter 5: Findings on Identity

In my conversations with trustees about their role and responsibilities, we also talked about their institutions, namely their respective missions and identities. I present findings on these aspects in this chapter¹⁸. I discover that participants' views of their colleges' identities generally align with common descriptors (e.g., single sex, Catholic, etc.) of those colleges. However each institution's identity is composed of multiple facets or aspects. Thus, a simple description of any of the participating colleges does not reflect the myriad ways trustees perceive their institutions. Finally, trustees reveal that even core aspects of their institution's identities are susceptible to change, an admission that paves the way for an exploration into when change is the focus of trustees' attention.

Identity Perception

As I detail in the Research Design & Methods section, I selected participant sites from a narrow set of institutions with well-established and widely known identities. I did not assume that the trustees in my sample would necessarily define their institutions as I did, but I discovered that their views generally aligned with mine. That is, participants also defined their colleges as Catholic, HBCU, liberal arts, or single sex. As I had imagined, several board chairs described their institutions using two or more of the identity categories. Brandi, for instance,

¹⁸ See the "Defining Terms: Mission and Identity" subsection in the Research Design and Methods chapter for a discussion of my use of the terms "mission" and "identity."

identifies her college as a “ Strong liberal arts college—in this case, single sex women’s college—very focused on the liberal arts but also trying to prepare young women for the world of work....” (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Marlin similarly illustrates how many of the sample’s colleges extend beyond one category when he describes his institution as “a small, Catholic...liberal arts college...focused on excellence in education and excellence in the student experience” (personal communication, March 13, 2015).

There were cases, however, where trustees did not cite longstanding or widely known aspects of their institutions’ identities. For a few participants in this group of trustees, some aspects of their colleges’ identities are simply taken for granted. For instance, Robert, chair of the board at a liberal arts college, neglected to reference that aspect of the school’s identity even though the college’s website consistently extols the institution’s liberal arts philosophy. When I asked him about this apparent oversight, he replied as follows:

...and the reason I didn't use that [term “liberal arts”]—again, it goes without saying that we are a college totally committed to the liberal arts. We're an undergraduate college only. We have [a number of] small graduate programs, but we are totally committed to the undergraduate liberal arts experience (personal communication, April 2, 2015).

Kimberly even expresses surprise when I questioned her on whether the college’s focus on women and the liberal arts were aspects of the institution’s identity:

Kimberly: It is a—basically, the mission of the college is to provide an excellent liberal arts education to women.... That's what's written down, so I kind of took that as a given.

Interviewer: Okay, all right, terrific. No, thank you.

Kimberly: I know I shouldn't do that today. Thinking back on it with the arguments that are happening about liberal arts education, but I just...to me, it's such a bedrock of what we do and who we are that I didn't think I needed to say it (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

There were other trustees who did not identify their colleges as I had, and for reasons unrelated to the taken-for-grantedness expressed above by Robert and Kimberly. For instance, three of the four HBCU board chairs in the sample discussed how racial demographics informed each of their views on their respective colleges. One of those board chairs, Edward, cites the institution's history to explain why the "historically Black" designation is not entirely accurate for his college: "It's different in the sense that it was founded by [African-American and non-Black churches]. And its faculty from the beginning has been a mixed faculty while the student body was not" (personal communication, April 4, 2015). Another HBCU chair, Leonard, points to how changes to the racial makeup of the student body inform his perception of the college. He observes that "the school is promoting diversity; about two years ago [we] crowned our first [non-Black] college queen" (personal communication, May 22, 2015). HBCU board chair Glen expresses a similar view. Though he concedes that the historically Black dimension of the college's identity is "close to the top" of a group of words he would use to describe the college, he also acknowledges "we are dealing with growing diversity in our student enrollment" (personal communication, April 3, 2015).

The shift in the racial and ethnic makeup of prospective college students has been a topic of robust discussion among higher education pundits and analysts [Baum, 2010; Belkin, 2013; Carlson, 2013; Hoover, 2014). The increasing diversity in the student bodies at Leonard and Glen's respective colleges is evidence of this change. In Glen's case, it is not clear that the college has taken steps to actively promote non-Black student enrollment. He does, however, extol the apparent virtues of his HBCU, effectively pointing to aspects that non-Black students might find attractive:

We happen to have a pretty substantial percentage of Latino students in our university, and they find the same benefit that our African-American students have found for years, and that it is a supportive and nurturing environment that helps grow them, not just academically but as a person, and creates future opportunities for them to be successful. So I think that appeals to both Anglo and Latino students as well. We are a small environment, and so that has an appeal to certain students in itself (personal communication, April 3, 2015).

Leonard, however, makes clear that his college is actively "promoting diversity" (personal communication, May 22, 2015). As Glen's comment suggest, one strategy to promote diversity at HBCUs is to draw attention to other long-standing aspects of the college's identity—small size, nurturing environment—that appeal to Black and non-Black students. By re-prioritizing the identity aspects that they extol, Black colleges may succeed in widening the population of prospective students to more readily accommodate growing numbers of students in non-Black communities.

Like their HBCU peers, most of the board chairs (i.e., three of four) from Catholic colleges expressed a nuanced view of their institutions' religious identity. Although their descriptions of their colleges implied or casually referenced the institutions' Catholic heritage and mission, these board chairs did not expressly use "Catholic" to define the institutions. When I shared this observation with them, the participants offered some insights. Each agreed that "Catholic" describes their colleges' identity. However, as Andrew points out, "Catholic" can be imbued with meanings that do not fully reflect other aspects that the college values: "You know Catholicism is not a uniform religion in many ways and there are matters of emphasis with it" (personal communication, March 21, 2015). Wes extends this observation, insisting, "there is more emphasis on the Catholic values than there is on the Catholic faith, [the] Catholic Church" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). One of those values, community, runs through the comments of each trustee in this group of board chairs. Wes elaborates:

There's a big chapel. I don't think 10 percent of the students go to services. But when there was a death on campus last year, everybody in the campus went to the chapel for the service. So it is a grounding force on campus, but it's not proselytizing the Catholic faith. I think that is a big part of the reality of the school. I would say if the students, what they really feel in their gut is they feel community, service orientation, and I think the Catholic values are faith-based values is what they really feel (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

In Andrew and Ellyn's view, the importance of community extends directly from the colleges' founding religious orders. Thus, it is important to reference these religious orders, along with the college's Catholic heritage, when discussing the

institution's identity. For instance, Ellyn, an alumna of the college whose board she now chairs, recalls the sense of community she felt as an undergraduate—a sense that she attributes to the institution's founding religious order:

But at that time it was extremely useful on campus that you felt that you were living in a community. And so the monastic members were part of that community, so you really have that [sense of the religious order]. Even with the smaller population of [members of the religious order] on campus, you still feel it. You still feel it in the traditions. You see it in the way that people respect and respond to one another. I think you feel it in a way that the campus is respected in terms of care and attention to the appearance of the campus and creating a home really that any person would love to live there and be part of (personal communication, April 11, 2015).

Andrew similarly credits his college's founding religious order with the sense of community on that campus. Below he reinforces the notion that all Catholic colleges are not the same, asserting that the premium the religious order places on certain values distinguishes his institution from other Catholic schools:

But you have to then understand the sponsorship of the school and so the [religious order] aspect of it becomes critically important because if you were to contrast that with some of the other orders, [the founder of the religious order] was about more in the community and more how one learns in a more human way and as contrasted to some of the other orders which can be more scholarly and individual in terms of what they do and certain aspects of how they approach education (personal communication, March 21, 2015).

Identity Complexity

Comments from the HBCU and Catholic college trustees above reveal how a simple description (e.g., Catholic college) may not reflect the fullness or complexity of an institution's identities. Other trustees in the study also shed light

on the complexity of their institutions, describing a variety of aspects—size, location, residential education—that they perceive to be central to their respective colleges’ identities.

Size

The colleges in this sample are small. The mean undergraduate enrollment size is 1,769 students. Size was not a condition for participation in this study, but multiple trustees define their colleges in terms of size. Alex, for example, describes his college as “a small liberal arts college that focuses on a close mentor/mentee relationship between the faculty and the students” (personal communication, April 10, 2015). Gary shares a similar view when asked to use three words that describe the college’s identity, saying, “I would say, first of all, women, that would be the first thing that comes to the mind. The other thing would be small. “Nurturing” would be another word that comes to mind” (personal communication, April 4, 2015). Glen’s perspective is also consistent with this theme as he offers, “Well, I would say it creates a small and nurturing environment where the focus is on you as an individual and your opportunity to learn and grow in your educational experience, to create lifelong relationships” (personal communication, April 3, 2015). Thus, for these trustees, increasing the number of students on campus threatens a key aspect of the college’s identity. Gary attests to this during our interview:

Right now our ratio is 11:1, teacher-student ratio. That's pretty small. You get it up to 22:1 that cut the nurtured in half.... But now people say we can't afford to be at 11:1. Nobody can. That's what they say, right? So, yeah, I think the threat is size (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Location

Location is also an aspect that several trustees view as fundamental to their respective colleges' identities. Rural college trustees in particular referenced location of the school as tied with their views of their institutions. At Nancy's college, location provides for other aspects of a college's identity including academic offerings and student profile. Her comments below illustrate this interaction:

Okay the sense of place. Because we are located in a somewhat suburban and rural location there is a strong sense of place.... And then the other piece of it is that we are located near the coast. And as a result we attract people who have a strong sense of love of the outdoors and love of the ocean and it informs a little bit some of our unique environmental studies programs because we have the advantage of a location near the coast that allows us to do study, in the context of the liberal arts (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

Sean offers a similar view on the role of location in the making of the college's identity, underscoring aspects that relate to location—weather, isolation, travel—that distinguish the college in ways that may attract some students and deter others:

[The college is located in a place] which is spectacularly beautiful, but remote. It's three hours from [a regional airport] and five hours from [a major international airport]. And although there are flights, they get cancelled—so it's non trivial, it's pretty far away. And the winters are long. So those two characteristics in addition to a very unique pedagogy and

curriculum and system of governance it sort of self-selects for certain kinds of students (personal communication, March 14, 2015).

Residential Education

Implied in these comments is another identity facet that each of the participating colleges share: they are residential campuses. A handful of trustees talk about the importance of this to their institutions. For a trustee who views the residential requirement as a fundamental dimension of the education the college offers, the rapid expansion of distance education presents an interesting dilemma. Across American higher education some institutions are offering online learning platforms as a way to generate revenue. Others look to leverage online learning technology to improve efficiency and drive down cost, subscribing to online course packages in order to offer students an array of courses that the college does not offer. In each case, for remotely located schools, online learning technology may be a solution that allows these colleges to overcome the challenges brought on by their location. Yet, how does an institution that puts a premium on location or residential education adopt a technology that may alter important parts of its identity? Wes expresses the dilemma thus:

[E]ach college has to adopt a unique operating model that supports the image and their faculty, their students, their staff that would allow that college to be sustainable in an era where we're going through a transition. So that's present all the time. Sometimes it's very - it's right here in your face, big time present. Like, why aren't we creating our own MOOCs? Why aren't we doing distance learning for the people in Puerto Rico? Boy, that would be a change to our mission statement, wouldn't it? We're a liberal arts residential college in northern New England where the

environment is a big part of our situation. Why aren't we signing up students 1,500 miles away to take a lecture on our courses (personal communication, March 12, 2015)?

Community Relationships

Trustees also cited other, less visible aspects as central to their institutions' identities. Several trustees in the sample discuss their colleges' deep connections to their local communities. Of these, Isabelle and Glen paint a picture that reveals how their institutions' relationship with the community equates to an important aspect of the college's identity. Isabelle describes her college's relationship the local town as follows:

We are isolated in New England. The college and the town are inseparable and the town is important to the college and the college is very important to the economic well being of the town and the community. So we spend time on those relationships. And that goes across the board from helping the town build a bridge to United Way campaign to whatever is going on in the town (personal communication, March 17, 2015).

In order to protect that relationship the board refused to use layoffs as part of a cost cutting strategy during the 2009 financial crisis. During that time, many institutions nationwide, including at least two colleges in the sample, reduced staff to help cut costs and otherwise regain a more sure financial footing. Trustees at Isabelle's college, however, viewed layoffs as a breach of relationship with the town, a relationship that had become part of its identity. Instead, the college relied on "early retirements [and] non-filling of normal turnoffs, but no layoffs because that would so break the relationship that was important between the college and

the community that depend on us for a lot of their jobs” (personal communication, March 17, 2015).

Community relationship as a part of a college’s identity takes a more profound form at Glen’s college. Below, the HBCU board chair responds to a question about a time when the board discussed a change to the college’s mission or identity:

Our institution is located in a part of the city that segregated over the years. It has undergone a revitalization, gentrification as some people might call it, and it’s a hotbed right now, area of development and opportunity for development. And we have 25 acres in that corner. And so some of our property holdings may offer a lot of value for the institution in terms of revenue streams that could be produced. And so we’re moving through a process now of determining how we might monetize some of those holdings. And part of the push on that is how can we do this without degrading or moving away from our mission and responsibility as an institution of higher education for those who have limited educational opportunities. So I think there’s a balance that we always have to maintain, and I think the concern about us moving more to those development options is whether or not it would change the nature, character, and identity of the institution (personal communication, April 3, 2015).

Specifically, the board has taken up the issue of whether and how a Historically Black College can capitalize on a real estate opportunity if doing so means facilitating the departure of low-income African-Americans who live in the surrounding neighborhood. This dilemma illustrates how a relationship with a local community can become a fundamental part of how the college is viewed, and how that aspect informs the trustees’ decision making regarding change.

Admissions and Financial Aid

In a few cases, institutional policy has become an aspect of a colleges' identity. Specifically, a handful of trustees were unequivocal in expressing the importance of need-blind admissions—and meeting full financial need—to their colleges' missions or identities. Brandi offers her view on the policy as follows:

We're probably one of the most generous liberal arts colleges providing aid, and we've got [more than half] of our students on aid.... But it is and always has been in our mission to—we're probably the least elite of the women's colleges in the sense that we've always gone after a more moderate-income level population, and we have always given a lot of scholarship money since day one (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Kimberly's views on the intersection of need-blind admissions and the college's identity are just as clear and strong, saying, “I mean, need-blind admission is at the core of our identity, who we are....” (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Marlin agrees, noting the challenge of maintaining a generous financial aid program while remaining devoted to it because of its perceived place in the college's mission:

Today we're needs blind and we meet every demonstrated need of every student. And that's a risky, ambitious, and expensive endeavor. And it's one that we embrace but we talk about it a lot because while it is consistent with our mission and very mission driven, you begin to worry about how long can you continue to do that and at what expense for other things does that happen. And yet, I think the thing that sort of drives home to us how important it is at [our college] -- We've always educated middle class kids... So we talk about that a lot because it is mission driven, but it's also a lot about who we are and how we think about ourselves (personal communication, March 13, 2015).

What stands out about these trustees and their views is a common quality the institutions share. The five trustees who cite need-blind admissions as an important aspect of their colleges' missions and identities are board chairs at highly selective institutions¹⁹. This may not be a coincidence. These institutions have considerable financial resources relative to other colleges in the sample, and can bring those resources to bear in an area such as financial aid.

Student Body Profile

Trustees also shed light on how changes to an institution's student body can be a departure—sometimes profound—from a college's mission or identity. At first glance, it seems obvious that the student body makeup might be an important aspect of a college's identity. As I note in the Research Design and Methods chapter, I included single-sex colleges and HBCUs because I view their all-men, all-women, or predominantly Black student bodies as fundamental aspects of these institutions. Indeed, at Todd's college, the all-male aspect of the school's identity remains important to its board, compelling the trustees to remain single sex as Todd recounts below:

So anyhow, were we a buggy whip? Had we become obsolete? So that was the way the discussion went.... And it got very vocal, and it pretty much stopped the progress of the College for two or three years while this thing was debated. There were a lot of emotions, as you can imagine. But ultimately, we, as I told you, decided to stay all-male (personal communication, April 9, 2015).

¹⁹ Brandi, Kimberly, and Marlin's colleges are among the top ten most selective colleges in the sample.

As I illustrate earlier some HBCU board chairs talked about the increase in non-Black students at their institutions. Though this could be viewed as a threat to the institutions' identities as Black colleges, I will show later that these trustees did not view this change as such. However, Lawrence, another Black college board chair, points to a different kind of student body change that, in his view, threatens his HBCUs historical identity.

Well, I think for us, the decision to cap at 15% developmental students is a departure from our history because we essentially were practicing open admissions before. And I think the decision not to do that as much, to be more selective about who we'll even take as a developmental student, was sad for us because there are these stories of the ill-prepared, poor student who comes to the University, settles down, takes advantage of all the tutoring and special help available, and four years later graduates with the first college degree in his family's history or her family's history. Those stories lift our hearts and inspire us, but at the same time the numbers told us that if you had too many developmental students, your retention and graduation rates suffered and they were, in fact, the students who were most likely to be disruptive. So there was a sadness in making that paradigm shift but a realization that if we don't change, we could go the way of the dinosaur. And we don't want to do that (personal communication, March 18, 2015).

During our conversation, Lawrence clearly and consistently described his college as an HBCU; he expresses pride in what he describes as that "tradition" (personal communication, March 18, 2015). Still, like other Black colleges in the study, his institution is reaching out beyond the Black community for students, even building a campus in an area that is predominantly white and Latino. Yet it is the college's becoming more selective that he cites when I ask him to reflect on a time when the board discussed a change to the institution's identity. For Patrick, chair of a faith-

based liberal arts college, a move towards a more open form of admission would represent a profound change to the college:

We ask [in the college application] that the student describe their faith and their personal story in regards to faith. And if the institution was to say, “You know because of market forces it’s frankly too hard to find other intentionally Christian students who are in the seventeen to twenty-two year old cohort,” and that we need to have open admissions, that would be a major change for the institution because you literally can no longer accomplish what the mission is that you set out to be (personal communication, April 16, 2015).

Patrick’s comments illustrate that his college, like all others in the sample, bears a complex identity composed of multiple facets. Consequently, the complexity of these colleges’ identities means that a change to the well-known description (e.g. HBCU) is not the only time that the institution’s identity can be threatened. At Nancy’s college, for example, a change to the school’s liberal arts approach, its close relationship with the community, or its need-blind admissions policy can signify a threat to its identity. Thus, at any given time, a college may be engaged with issues in areas that, if changed, would represent a significant change. Furthermore, because there are many facets to an institution’s identity, what may appear as a major shift to a more visible aspect of the college must instead be understood within the context of the multi-faceted identity. Greater diversity, for instance, in HBCU student enrollment may give the impression that the institution has experienced a profound change to its identity when, instead, changes to size, a nurturing environment, or an open admissions policy may represent a more fundamental identity shift.

Identity Adaptability

I suggest above that, depending on the institution, a variety of changes at a college can be perceived by trustees as a threat to the school's identity. Going co-ed, increasing the student body size, changing admissions standards, instituting a new course—each of these and more can be viewed as a major identity shift to a trustee. In my conversations with trustees, I also find that nearly every trustee views his or her institutions' identity and mission as complex with some aspects more easily adapted to changing circumstances than others. However participants' attitudes towards the adaptability of core identity issues varied. Some trustees showed flexibility in their views. I describe them as “Never say ‘never.’” Other participants, a group I describe as “Almost say ‘never,’” gave more guarded responses. The last group, “Never,” took rigid positions on change to core identity aspects.

Never say “never.”

Some trustees in the sample unequivocally view their institutions' missions and identities as susceptible to change. Their “Never say ‘never’” views shed light on how trustees make sense of their colleges' place and identity over time. Sean's openness to a changing identity is motivated by the college's young history:

“Never” is a long time [to not change any aspect of the college's identity].... Remember: this institution is [less than 50 years old]. I bet of the colleges you're surveying, [mine] is among the youngest. And so I think

you need to be responsible but open to changes as a trustee or steward of an institution like that, in a way that might be different from a hundred and fifty year old institution (personal communication, March 14, 2015).

In his view, a condition of responsible trusteeship at a young college is openness to change. Implied in his comment is the idea that trustees of older institutions are more inclined to resist change. However, the trustees from these older institutions seem to disagree. Alex, chair of a 70-year-old college asserts that “everything is on the table” when major identity issues are raised (personal communication, April 10, 2015). His view of good decision-making, not the college’s relative youth, motivates him to encourage discussion of even the most fundamental aspects of the college’s identity:

So I would like to think, because I think it’s a good way to approach any decision is that you put everything on the table and then you reassess your commitment to some of those issues that people say are untouchable (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

I also talked to board chairs of even older colleges—institutions whose lives spanned a century or more. Even these trustees find change to be an inevitable—indeed, necessary—phenomenon. Justin and Gary, for example, make an astute observation: refusal to change can facilitate a college’s demise. In Justin’s words, “if we are who we were 20 years ago, we wouldn’t be standing. So, we better not rest on our laurels” (personal communication, April 17, 2015). Gary agrees, observing, “there have been people saying they would always be a women’s college. Well, those colleges are going under, and now they’re coed. So I can’t say that [there are aspects of our identity that will always endure] because

there are a lot of things that dictate that” (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Brandi elaborates on this sentiment, spelling out the those things that she perceives will motivate change at her 200-year-old college:

I never say “never,” right? Because I think markets change. I think students change. I think the way we deliver education is going to change constantly with modern communications and all sorts of ways to distribute education, and I don’t believe that colleges are the only place that education is going to happen in this world.... So, yes, do I see things continuously changing? Yes (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Try to say “never.”

Other trustees in the sample were more circumspect in their views on whether their colleges’ identities would endure. On one hand, they argue that certain core aspects of the identity will never change. On the other hand, their comments also reveal the unlikelihood of identity permanence. Observe, for instance, how Sylvia balances the remote possibility that her institution will someday go co-ed with the present-day reality that supports her commitment to single-sex education:

Well, I do feel that the serious education of women endures. Forever? I don’t know. There may come a time when it won’t be necessary. But that isn’t now, and we still see a need to remain as a woman’s college, and in fact, applications grew last year (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Glen also asserts the endurance of a central dimension of the college’s identity (i.e., being an HBCU) while acknowledging the possibility—or probability—of a change to that same aspect:

It is in our DNA that we’re a historically black university, and so I think that’s always going to be referenced, and I think we’re always going to look

back to that as the cornerstone of our identity. I think, though, that there'll be some broadening in terms of it being viewed or considered more of an urban institution, whatever that might mean, you know (personal communication, April 3, 2015).

Kimberly takes a firm stance on the immutability of core aspects of her college's identity, explaining the college's commitment to these things thus:

I think the commitment to the liberal arts is at the foundation of what we do and that's not going to change... We are a residential college and that means more than housing your students, so that's not going to change... We're a single-sex institution. I can't –you know that's a harder one to say “never say never” because a lot of people have said “never” and then it's changed, but we aren't having those conversations (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Thus despite her apparent conviction, she still concedes the possibility that her college may someday become co-ed.

Never

Some trustees, however, did not give an inch when asked whether aspects of their institutions' missions or identities would endure. Patrick is adamant about his institution's commitment to its faith-based heritage, asserting “Oh! Absolutely. No question. And if [our identity doesn't endure] then the college just becomes like so many other institutions that do not have a Christian identity at the center of the institution like these institutions used to a century ago” (personal communication, April 16, 2015). Todd is equally convinced of the endurance of key aspects of his college, observing that “The commitment to the liberal arts, the sense of character building, the small classes, the all-maleness of the College:

those things are sacrosanct. And we honor them and they aren't on the table for discussion" (personal communication, April 9, 2015). Other board members share this sentiment. Richard, chair of the board at a women's college, maintains, "[I]t will always be a women's college. Two, it will always be a liberal arts college. Three, it has established a tradition of excellence in education, and that will never change" (personal communication, May 12, 2015).

Yet, even these participants, in their own way, leave open the door to core identity change. Patrick, for instance, later describes good trusteeship as constant engagement with change. Notwithstanding Todd's description of certain qualities of his college as "sacrosanct," he also shared with me a time when he believed that the college could not be excellent without changing one of those core dimensions. Patrick, as I will show later, takes a progressive view of liberal arts education that is a clear departure from traditional conceptions of that education approach. I offer these examples to illustrate how even trustees who express unwavering belief in the permanence of certain fundamental aspects of the college still, in their own way, concede change.

What I also observed among some of the responses was a referencing of certain values, ideas, or purposes with which the institution also identified. In doing so, these trustees appear to make the claim that their institutions, at their core, will remain unchanged to the extent that they adhere to these values. In some cases, trustees referenced a formal set of principles upon which the college rested.

Edward, for instance, talks about a doctrine that embodies operating principles that will never change:

We have something called [the] College Ideal, and it has been, I think. . .it was relevant 130 years ago. It's still relevant today when we talk about what we hope our students will become and how they will grow both in character and in knowledge and in relevance to the world in which we live. Those principles don't change. The courses will change.... And other things will change as the world changes and as the requirement for being a world citizen changes. But the principles that guide us, the basis of that [doesn't] change (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Marlin references a set of values attributable to the founder of the religious order that founded the Catholic college. Like Edward, he concedes the physical change the institution that will undergo, but maintains that the essence of the college will endure in the form of these values.

Well I think that the [religious order] values.... Those things I don't think will ever change. Those came from [the religious order's founder], and they're here today. They'll be here probably forever. How you implement those; how you best make use of those: that does changes as society changes (personal communication, March 13, 2015).

Other trustees describe core values—some of which are formally documented and others that participants assert are widely held at the college. Lawrence, for instance, maintains that the colleges' identity, reflected in its commitment to facilitating social mobility, will remain unchanged:

I don't think our identity as an HBCU will change. We believe that the HBCU model will work for any people on the bottom who don't want to be on the bottom anymore, whether they are immigrants or poor people or whoever. This model of empowerment and encouragement is a model that will always be viable as long as there are some people who are on the bottom who don't want to stay there (personal communication, March 18, 2015).

Nancy cites social responsibility as a unique aspect of her college's identity that will remain unchanged:

This sense of the common good and providing people with a sense that they are part of a larger world and a larger community and that as responsible citizens it's their responsibility to give back in some way. The common good piece I think is unique to us and I think will never change (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

Drawing upon ideas and values as identity aspects gives these trustees freedom to contemplate and execute considerable change at their institutions without, conceivably, breaching the essential aspect of the college. Curriculum changes, student body changes, how education is delivered—these things do not alter what Roland would describe as the “soul” of the college. At the same time, these principles and values are not unique to these institutions. Majority white, non-selective institutions can present empowerment and encouragement as an aspect of their identities. Catholic colleges are not alone in the value they put on community or social responsibility. It seems, therefore, that achieving endurance and distinction of identity is conditional upon whether and how these expressed values are in evidence on campus over time.

Summary

I approached this study with a keen interest in understanding how trustees thought about their responsibility change vis-à-vis their institution's missions and identities, fundamental aspects that reflect what the institution is. From my conversation with trustees three identity related themes emerged: 1) trustees

identify their institutions according to the key descriptor that I had used in selecting them; 2) participants perceive their college as having complex identities with multiple facets; 3) trustees view their institution's identity as mutable.

As I spell out in the chapter on Research Design and Methods, I solicited board chairs to participate in this study based on their institutions' widely known identity. Colleges were organized into groups including Catholic, HBCU, liberal arts, and single sex. Although I did not want to take it as a given that trustees would also define their colleges using these simple descriptors, in most cases they did. However, this was not always the case. Indeed, two groups of trustees did not use the terms above to identify their colleges. Individuals in the first group admitted to taking for granted the identity that I used to define the college: being single sex or liberal arts, for instance, was so central to the college's identity as to go without saying. Trustees from the other group, HBCU and Catholic College board chairs, agreed with my perception of the college's identity, but shed light on their more nuanced views of the college. HBCU board chairs, for instance refrained from identifying their colleges as HBCUS, citing diversity within the faculty and staff or growing diversity in the student body. Catholic college trustees from this group did affirm their institutions' Catholic identities. However, they emphasized the sponsoring religious orders and values such as community, asserting that these aspects distinguished them from other institutions and represented what students would experience on their respective campuses.

I also came to know of other aspects to the study's colleges that trustees perceive to be important. Physical aspects such as the colleges' size and location are important to many trustees. So too is the residential nature of the schools. Trustees talked about how changes to these dimensions could be viewed as a threat to the institutions' identities. Participants also named other, more obscure identity aspects including community relationship and a need-blind financial aid policy. Finally, trustees shared their views on the student body as an aspect of identity.

Trustees perceive their institutions' identities to be mutable. However, there are clear distinctions in the extent to which participants are willing to concede this view. Some trustees, those I label as "Never say 'never,'" express a clear and strong view that even fundamental aspects of their colleges will change. Others, the "Try to say 'never'" group, are more circumspect. While they acknowledge the possibility, or probability, of change to their institutions, they also express some measure of resistance to this idea. That resistance is not as strong as that expressed by trustees from the "Never" group. These individuals are unequivocal in their comments, describing, in one case as "immutable" and "sacrosanct" fundamental aspects of the institution's identity. As I go on to show, however, these trustees also speak and act in ways to suggest that even they understand that their colleges' will change.

The above findings illustrate trustees' views of their colleges' identities: complex and adaptable. In the next chapter I aim to show how trustees view

themselves as responsible for managing change, including change to their institutions' missions or identities. I also identify times during which change discussions are likely to take place, and offer a rough taxonomy for those occasions.

Chapter 6: Managing Change

In the preceding chapters, I presented trustees' views on their responsibilities and their institutions' identities. In this chapter, I present findings on trustees' perceptions on managing change. What I discovered is that participants perceive change management to be their defining responsibility, embedded in everything that they do. All forms of change are not the same, however, and trustees elaborate upon two kinds of change evident in their work. Nor do trustees view themselves as exclusive change agents at their institutions. Instead, they describe sharing the responsibility for change management at the college with various constituencies, particularly the faculty. Mission and identity are central themes in trustees' change management work, but informants' sense of how they manage change to these areas differs. Finally, participants' comments about change shed light on three kinds of occasions—Industry, Board, and Environmental—during which trustees contemplate fundamental mission and identity change.

Responsibility for Managing Change

In Chapter 3, trustees talk about their fiduciary responsibility, a role that entails ensuring their institutions' quality and sustainability. Presumably, a fiduciary is responsible for managing change. Trustees, however, do not explicitly describe their governing role as such. However, their comments throughout our conversations make clear that managing change is a central responsibility that

touches nearly every aspect of trustees' work at their institutions. Indeed, Alex even expresses confusion when I asked him about the role of trustees vis-à-vis change management:

I'm not sure I understand the question because essentially every discussion you have in some degree concerns change. You're adopting a policy. You're voting on something that somehow is changing whatever the status quo is (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Kimberly underscores the continual nature of change management, using her board's engagement with fiscal matters as an example. She observes, "Well, we're constantly talking about how we change our financial model so that we're continuing to be strong and we're continuing to focus on the priorities that we have" (personal communication, April 4, 2015). Edward's board is similarly engaged with change, noting that, "Well, we discuss change at every meeting because we are looking at our strategic plan" (personal communication, April 4, 2015). Patrick's board also continuously engages in discussions about change. Indeed, he observes that, "a good board discusses change at every meeting" (personal communication, April 16, 2015). Below he explains his view on change management and good trusteeship:

The very nature of an institution that is growing and that is vibrant is one that adapts to the marketplace. And there are several different markets that a board needs to be watching of so I would say every meeting they need to be on top of discussing change (personal communication, April 16, 2015).

The comments above support the idea that change management is a central part of a trustee's role, and that trustees are actively engaged with managing

change at their colleges. However, as trustees shared more about their work and discussing change, differences began to appear in their characterization of change management. Some participants separated their discussions about change into two groups, using words such as “tactical” or “incremental” to describe smaller or more routine change. Nancy offers some examples as she reflects on her own board’s work:

I would say that we are constantly looking at change, but most of the time it’s smaller changes: adding a building here, creating a new program there, adding a sport, looking at, for example, we’re in this world of massive online open courses and distance learning, looking at the way those changes are relevant to us and how we can continue to be relevant in that world. Doing a new fundraising campaign, looking at the possibility of attracting a different kind of student. We talk about those issues at almost every board meeting (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

Trustees talk about discussing more profound change less frequently. As one participant points out, these conversations can be described as “strategic.” Nancy continues, illustrating such a discussion that took place on her campus:

The big, big issues—really changing the place—I would say those are probably once a decade. For example, fifteen years ago we undertook this committee on the future where we went out and interviewed a bunch of schools. What they thought the new trends were in education, and that informed a lot of our discussion at the board level afterwards (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

Sean likewise organizes his views on change management into two groups. Below he sheds light on the times during which those discussions take place:

So, I guess in terms of... I would divide this into tactical and strategic changes or incremental versus secular changes. So, in the former bucket of tactical or incremental changes, [we discuss change] every single meeting. This constantly changes around new hires, new direction in key academic programs, new approaches to positioning ourselves with prospective

students or prospective donors, departures in the faculty, all of those sorts of things. Those are every meeting. In terms of the broader, longer-term changes we have a strategic planning cycle of every five years; we're about to enter that (personal communication, March 14, 2015).

Change Agents

Glen also observes that more routine matters are discussed “on a regular basis through our committees and at our board meetings,” whereas “strategic change” takes place less frequently (personal communication, April 3, 2015). He goes on to observe that larger, more profound change discussions take place less frequently because the board must “...engage a wide range of stakeholders and constituencies in that discussion” (personal communication, April 3, 2015). Indeed, the trustees in this study detail several constituents that motivate, lead, or inform change discussions and change decisions at a college. Shared governance, the tradition of power sharing among campus constituencies is well-known to—and respected by—these trustees. Brandi shares her view of power vis-à-vis decision-making at the college as she reflects on the groups to whom she feels responsible:

...and I mentioned the word “shared governance” earlier. I think after a time you get very aware of the needs and the power of a faculty. You get very aware of the needs and power of an alumnae constituency. You get very aware of the administrative team from the president’s office and deans of faculty, deans of students, and deans of enrollment as to what their role is in actually implementing strategy (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Trustees talk especially about the role of the faculty in managing change. Robert shares his view of board and faculty responsibility below:

...there are areas of the faculty only where ideas of change comes from, curriculum being one. And so the board, we know not to...we know how to ask questions about it, but we know that's not our domain to bring about innovation in curriculum or programs or you know whatever (personal communication, April 2, 2015).

David tells a story that similarly illustrates many of the trustees' views of their authority and power vis-à-vis faculty. Recounting the introduction of a business major at the traditionally liberal arts college, he observes, "So, I think it was textbook perfect and many other schools looked at us and said 'How the hell did it do that in fifteen months?' Which is lightning speed. Done incorrectly, the faculty could've said, 'Screw you. Not happening'" (personal communication, March 19, 2015). Even Roland, whose college's charter gives the board responsibility for the curriculum admits to being "loathe to get involved in curricular matters" (personal communication, April 16, 2015). Richard goes even further, extending faculty's role in change management beyond the curriculum by arguing, "In fact, whatever change is going to occur...needs to emanate from the faculty" (personal communication, May 12, 2015).

Responsibility for Mission & Identity

As trustees reveal above, managing change at their institutions is an overarching and ongoing responsibility that they undertake in various ways during their tenures. Notably, participants describe a responsibility for mission and identity as an essential—perhaps the most essential—part of their change

management role. As Patrick asserts, “Well the mission is behind—I mean, the reason we have responsibilities is in the pursuit of the mission of the institution” (personal communication, April 16, 2015). Robert agrees, giving voice to the trust that they have been assigned to keep as fiduciaries of their institutions:

Well, certainly we're the keepers. You know, we are one of the shared keepers of it. We entrust that mission and executing it to the president and his staff and the faculty, but we are the ones that have to ask the questions to make sure that we adhere to it (personal communication, April 2, 2015).

Isabelle echoes this sentiment, pointing to trustees’ personal investment in their institutions as illustrative of their commitment to and support of the college’s mission and identity:

You really feel responsible to the mission of the college. These positions take a lot of time and you end up making a lot of financial investment in them. And it’s because you believe in them and you want to perpetuate what they are doing and keep it current and modern and appropriate and all that (personal communication, March 17, 2015).

David goes even further, shedding light on a responsibility for mission and identity that is motivated by respect for sacrifices others have made in pursuit of a vision of the college:

[The founders of the college] gave their lives, their money, and their time to create a special place where students can grow and learn to be of use to the world and help. And to continue that mission is very important and you don’t want to disappoint all those people who have given money and time and effort to create a special place (personal communication, March 19, 2015).

Trustees’ earlier comments about the mutability of their institutions’ identities and their fundamental responsibility as change managers give the

impression that “responsibility” for mission and identity is equivalent to changing those dimensions. Their comments on mission and identity, however, show trustees endeavoring to balance adaptation to change with preservation of important aspects of the mission and identity. Brandi summarizes this approach, observing that, as fiduciaries, “We want to sustain the institution more or less on the same mission that it has always been on as we talked before” (personal communication, April 10, 2015). Andrew offers a similar view, describing the boards’ decision making process as following “guiding principles” to ensure that the college’s mission is at the center of choices the group makes:

The balancing from my perspective always is in the following manner: Mission has been set. You want to obviously be evaluating the mission. Is it consistent? Does it make sense? Does it meet the temper of the times? But if you’re comfortable with that, that at least provides you parameters to therefore then make what are certain tactical and certain strategic decisions that need to be adhered to (personal communication, March 21, 2015).

These views echo Patrick’s understanding of how his board accomplishes its work in the context of mission and identity. Below, he responds to a question about comments he made during a campus event where he described his institution’s mission as “timeless and timely:”

I think there’s really two answers to that. In the one sense that everyone that is there is excited and bought in to the current mission of the institution and also to its timeless character. And secondly, is always asking, “Are we articulating the most important aspects of the overall mission given both the constraints and the opportunities of the moment (personal communication, April 16, 2015)?”

Ensuring a mission's timeliness and timelessness seems a daunting task, difficult to execute and measure. However, several trustees take a practical stand, pointing to their actual work as the way in which the college's mission and identity are sustained and made relevant. Nancy discusses how a board's committee work is a practical example of how trustees execute their responsibility for mission and identity:

When you are part of a board of trustees you are influencing what goes on on-campus on their four years. And the breakdown of the committees sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly affects that. So if you are on the finance committee you want to make sure you are setting a tuition rate that is appropriate and that you're providing financial aid to be able to provide the student with an ability to be there... And you can kind of go through our committee structure and see that each of those committees serves a purpose in looking at the mission of the place and fulfilling it.... So the committee structure really is a microcosm or an analogy to what our mission is. And by serving on each of those committees you are working towards those ends (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

Leonard agrees, noting that, "In a large way, obviously, the board sets policy that if implemented would help the institution achieve its vision and mission (personal communication, May 22, 2015)."

Comments such as Nancy's and Leonard's seem to take it as a given that trustees specifically consider and discuss the college's mission and identity as they set policy and fulfill some of the more routine aspects of their work, including serving on committees. Put another way, these trustees appear to equate fulfillment of their responsibility for mission and identity with being an engaged trustee. However, not all trustees take this view. As my conversation with Chad

illustrates, successful execution of routine board work may not mean engagement with mission and identity:

You know, I think [responsibility for mission and identity] fits across everything we do. And [is it one where] we, for instance, sit at a trustee meeting and always go back and say, “Is this consistent with the mission?” We don’t. We don’t. Now, we don’t outwardly do it. You know, can I make the leap to say we always have it in our minds? That’s stretching because everyone’s got different points of views about everything (personal communication, March 19, 2015).

Chad’s comments surface the possibility that all trustee work does not necessarily concern mission and identity. As he points out, trustees cannot know each board member’s objectives or motivations; what strikes one trustee as an important dimension of identity may be different from what another board member considers a priority. Furthermore, trustees separation of their change management work into “routine” and “strategic” discussions lends support to the possibility that trustee engagement with mission and identity is not ubiquitous.

Discussing Change to the Mission or Identity

Despite differences in trustees’ views on whether they are constantly working in support of the mission and identity, my interviews reveal that there are times during which participants actively wrestle with questions of mission and identity. One such occasion is the revisiting of the college’s mission statement.

Alex provides an example:

Yes. I think we are constantly looking at how we are defining ourselves and our mission. And even beyond that, in the literal terms of a mission statement, how do we define our core values? And we constantly reevaluate

how we maintain those core values or change or adjust them (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Brandi also raises engagement with mission statement as an occasion when mission and identity are expressly on the table for discussion. In response to a question about a time during which the board contemplated making changes to the college's mission or identity, she observes:

We did a couple of things under my watch, and we did a couple of things along the path of my number of years on the board. We have revised our mission, or we have reexamined. Let me put it that way, reexamined our mission. We have just modified it very slightly over the years (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Roland's board similarly details purposeful engagement with mission and identity. In his experience, any notable change proposed by the board is first considered in light of the college's mission statement:

We start out with the discussion of our mission statement. And will the change help the mission statement? If you're going to change the mission statement, then tell me, we've got a mission statement. If you want to make that mission statement better, well, I think that reasonable people can sit down and look at our existing mission statement and know whether what's being proposed is better or not (personal communication, April 16, 2015).

The above examples reflect one occasion, consideration of the mission statement, during which a discussion about change to the mission or identity can occur. Over the course of my interviews, trustees shed light on three kinds of occasions that motivate intentional discussions of change to core aspects of their institutions' missions and identities. I describe these moments as Industry, Board,

and Environmental occasions.

Industry Occasions

An Industry occasion is a known and predictable moment in the life of a college in which purposeful discussions of the mission or identity are embedded. These events are common to all types of colleges in the sample. Because they are foreseeable, Industry occasions grant the board the opportunity to engage in a more measured, collaborative approach to change management, including planned discussions about how the board views the institution. Examples of Industry occasions include the accreditation and strategic planning processes, fundraising campaign planning, and presidential searches. Of the examples I provide, the accreditation and strategic planning processes were the most frequently cited times during which trustees talk about engagement with mission and identity. Below, Wes extols the higher education industry's accreditation process for forcing boards to be intentional in their discussion of mission and identity:

Well, one of the good things, I think, that happens in higher education is the accreditation process.... So, the good thing that happens, while you're busy going about your day, making sure that the college is financially viable and that you're attracting brighter students and the average SATs and—"Oh! Phi Beta Kappa! This is a great school!"—at the end of the day, you've got to go back and look at what...are you true to the mission statement? So I think accreditation really does a nice job in that regard (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

Accreditation, however, is not the only motivation for a college to document its vision and the ways in which it plans to realize that vision. Many of

the trustees in the sample point to the strategic planning process as the time during which major aspects of mission and identity are up for discussion. For Brandi's board, trustee of an undergraduate, single-sex, residential college, the strategic planning process is where they deliberated upon these central aspects of the college's mission and identity:

Yeah. It's interesting, all three of those topics—whether it's single-sex education, the development of graduate courses, and/or the online learning piece—were all areas of inquiry in our strategic study that was done now probably five years ago, maybe even six years ago (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

As I observe earlier, trustees cite fundraising and personal philanthropy as one of their responsibilities within the “Time, Talent, Treasure” adage. Glen connects the fundraising responsibility to engagement with mission and identity, observing how making a case for his institution means talking about its mission and identity.

[Responsibility for mission and identity] comes in largely during our fundraising efforts and activities, outreach. Obviously, when you pull out what people probably refer to as your elevator pitch in that you talk about the identity of the institution, the role it plays and the community and then the state, its mission of serving of being a historically black university and providing the educational opportunities for individuals that likely would not have such opportunities if we were not in existence (personal communication, April 3, 2015).

This view, that fundraising motivates discussion of mission and identity, lends support to the notion that fundraising planning, including campaign planning, is an occasion during which trustees will talk about mission and identity. Robert drives home this point, contending that, “as we enter a campaign...you know that's a time

to kind of re-evaluate where and who we are (personal communication, April 2, 2015).”

Similarly, a few trustees mentioned the presidential search process as a foreseeable time during which trustees will engage with mission and identity. Glen, board chair at an HBCU in the midst of a presidential search process, says that finding a candidate who understands the college’s identity and mission is crucial to a successful search for candidates:

We’re starting to develop a profile now, but we certainly want someone who understands the role and mission and needs of a historically black university. So that identity part is going to be pretty important for our next president... (personal communication, April 3, 2015).

Consider also Marlin’s view on the role of the lay board as Catholic colleges transition from religious to lay presidential leadership. He asserts, “carrying on the [religious order’s] influence and [their] guidance is really important for the lay board to understand, to embrace, and to implement” (personal communication, March 13, 2015). It is reasonable to suggest that, to implement the order’s influence by way of a lay college president, the board must be more purposeful and deliberate in its discussions about its Catholic mission and identity as it conducts its search. Ellyn lends support to this hypothesis, noting that her college’s recent transition from religious to lay presidential leadership was one of three priorities for which the discussion had been “pretty consuming” of the board’s time (personal communication, April 11, 2015). Brandi’s board was similarly attentive to the single-sex, liberal arts college’s needs, conducting a

strategic plan as part of their search efforts to clarify their understanding of the institution and its leadership needs:

We had done a strategic planning exercise under the chair in front of me, the retiring chair, because we were going to go out to search for a new president of the college. So we had done a fair amount of what I call pretty professional strategic planning over about an eighteen-month period with the board in order to define where do we think we were going therefore what kind of a president did we need (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Board Occasions

Above Brandi describes a more formal strategic planning process that her board engaged in as part of the presidential search process. I define this and similar occasions and Board occasions: board-organized discussions that are not routine aspects of every college's life. While these events may be the taken-for-granted way in which business is conducted among some boards, it is not a given that most or all boards expressly facilitate these occasions to discuss identity change. At Chad's liberal arts college, for instance, the board has developed a meeting agenda structure that creates space for discussion of "topics of interest," not the least of which are matters relating directly to the college's mission or identity:

...we've evolved our agenda structure at the university to have plenary sessions at all of our board meetings.... And we've evolved to this point we typically have three plenary session about topics of interest that relate to what's happening in the world. So the whole question of affordability of education, the whole question of relevance of a liberal arts education, the whole question of a mess of open online courses and digital technology, what's that going to do? Is it going to obsolete us or not? The whole

question of urban versus rural. Et cetera. Et cetera (personal communication, March 19, 2015).

Edward's board has similarly organized its time to facilitate discussion of the institution's mission and identity. Responding to a question about the issues the board discusses most, he offers the following:

That's a difficult question because we biannually, at least biannually, review the College in its entirety, and we do that at each of those two biannual meetings...We spend a day in our various committees that oversee the educational mission, that oversee the financial status of the institution, that oversee the strategic planning process for its future development, that oversee its relationships with community, that oversee its relationship again with the licensing and certification organizations, that meet with members of the staff in each of those instances and get reports from the heads of all of our departments and so forth (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Marlin's board relies in part on a committee on mission and identity to ensure that the trustees are consistently engaged with those concerns vis-à-vis the board's work:

We have a committee on mission and identity. And that's the way we deal with it. The committee is made up of members of the board and some non-board members. And they meet three times a year or more and discuss issues that are of interest for mission and identity. And they work in conjunction with the administration on being sure that we are focused properly on the [religious] order's mission and identity of [the college] (personal communication, March 13, 2015).

Aside from the fact that all colleges do not share these occasions, it is also important to note that a Board occasion does not surface topics concerning mission and identity by definition. For example, the plenary session topics that Chad references above do not always relate to the college's mission or identity. However, the development of that approach to addressing issues presumably

supports a more informed and thorough discussion about change vis-à-vis identity and mission relative to the reporting out approach that the board previously used.

Environmental Occasions

Earlier in this study I allude to a third occasion that trustees described in our conversations about mission and identity. An Environmental occasion is an unpredictable industry-wide occurrence that surfaces issues of mission or identity based on the institution's profile. Thus, although these events strike all institutions simultaneously, whether and how institutions' engage with mission or identity (i.e., why they talk about or change it) varies. The Great Recession, beginning with the 2008 U.S. stock market crash is an Environmental occasion that several trustees cite. As Isabelle recalls, "The financial crisis caused us to have a lot of hard, tactical discussions that would've changed our identity or relationship with the community" (personal communication, March 17, 2015). Robert's trustee board felt similarly challenged during the financial crisis, feeling pressure to change aspects of college. Like Isabelle, Robert is chair of a highly selective college that enjoys robust student applications and a large endowment.

Notwithstanding these apparent protections, the board was nevertheless challenged to think about letting go of some aspects of its identity:

Well, certainly during the downturn in '08 where we were forced to make some serious adjustments to our budget. Fortunately, we've been well-managed and we're rich. I say that in that the comparative basis we're fortunate. But we did have to make choices at the margin, nothing that threatened the core mission of who we are, but.... I think we're starting to

think about what would happen if it got worse and would we have to, for instance, carve out some of our sports (personal communication, April 2, 2015).

As I suggest above, during an Environmental occasion whether and how a board is confronted with an issue of mission and identity is conditional upon the institution's mission and identity. For instance, during the financial crisis, Isabelle's board elected to refrain from laying off staff. She contends that the board made this decision because the college identifies so closely with the community.

Recent and projected changes in Federal higher education policy have also motivated discussions of mission and identity at some institutions and not at others. For instance, in 2011, the Department of Education instituted stricter lending guidelines for the Direct PLUS loan program²⁰, making it harder for families to borrow money for college. The policy change had a well-documented disproportionate effect on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Agyeman-Fisher, 2013; Nelson, 2012; Young, 2013). Gary discusses how this environmental change forced his college's board to relax its newly instituted residency policy, a policy that is consistent with his view of the college as nurturing:

...the board just voted that it's a requirement that...you spend the first two years on campus. So we did that, but we had to back off a bit because student PLUS loans who, you know, students didn't have money to even -

²⁰ The Direct PLUS Loan Program is a higher education financial aid program run by the U.S. Department of Education. The Department serves as the lender, providing federal loans to graduate students and parents of dependent undergraduate students to help cover the cost of college or career school (Department of Education, 2015).

it was a real problem.... But we had to back off some of the things we put in place, but the whole idea is [that] —it's a half of GPA average higher for people who live on campus versus people who don't. And the reason is if it rains, you don't have a car, you don't come to class (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Although the loan policy change is relevant to all institutions, its impact was more keenly felt among HBCUs due to the large number of low-income students they serve who rely on Federal aid for college financing. In Gary's case, it forced the institution to make a policy change that contradicts its efforts to more fully enact its mission and identity as nurturing and supportive of student success.

The proposed federal college rating system, that ties student aid money to an institution's score (Kamenetz, 2014), also illustrates the differential effect that an Environmental occasion can have on institutions. Brandi, for instance, describes the Federal ratings system and other "disruptive" changes in the higher education environment as "outside influences that actually go through one's head" (personal communication, April 10, 2015). Compare this view with the action that Lawrence and his board took in anticipation of the Scorecard:

The day is coming very soon where your retention rate, your graduation rate are going to determine whether or not you qualify for some federal fund and some other funds. We also realized that some of our developmental students were coming because they wanted to have a college experience, not because they wanted to get a college education.... So we decided that by having less developmental students we would help our retention and graduation rates and would eliminate the source of a lot of our issues, a lot of our problems (personal communication, March 18, 2015).

The prospect of a Federal scorecard, mildly distressing to Brandi, compelled Lawrence's board to act pre-emptively, enacting a policy that departs from the

mission and identity of the institution “to empower people on the bottom to grow and meet their own needs and have a better life and a more equitable share of the American pie” (personal communication, March 18, 2015). Like the financial crisis and changes to the Direct PLUS loan program, the proposed federal rating system, while relevant to all institutions, will likely have a differential impact on colleges based on institutions’ profile or identity. Leaders from a variety of higher education organizations and institutions have already voiced broad concerns about the scorecard’s potential impact (Anderson & Rucker, 2013; Kiley, 2013; Yeagle, 2013). What Lawrence’s story illustrates is the potential affect of the scorecard on colleges’ that identify as serving underprepared students including many HBCUs.

Summary

In Chapter 4, trustees shared their views on their role and responsibilities, implying in many cases a responsibility for managing change at their institutions. In this chapter, I present their explicit views on change, and find trustees to perceive change management to be their defining responsibility. Respondents describe engagement with change as pervading everything that they do, and, in one case, go so far as to assert that a good board of trustees is always talking about change. Trustees distinguish, however, between the kinds of change they discuss, using words like “tactical” and “routine” to describe conversations about smaller, less profound changes, and “strategic” to signify engagement with larger issues frequently associated with mission or identity.

Notwithstanding their perceived responsibility for managing change, trustees also point to other constituencies on campus that bring influence to bear in the change management process. In particular, the participants point to the authority that faculty exercise—and that trustees respect—in curriculum-related and other areas. Mission and identity are key concerns for trustees; for some, protection of these dimensions is the reasons for a board's existence. Some trustees assert that their work—even routine responsibilities—is connected to mission and identity, but at least one trustee questions whether trustees' work equates to engagement with mission and identity by definition.

Participants do share, however, examples of occasions during which engagement with mission and identity occurs. I organize these occasions into three kinds of events: Industry, Board, and Environment. Industry occasions are commonplace across institutions. Examples include the accreditation and strategic planning processes, presidential searches, and fundraising campaign planning. Board occasions are those organized or prompted by a college's trustee board, creating space for discussions about mission and identity to take place. Examples are meeting agenda structure and committee structures that invite discussion of the institution's mission or identity. Environmental occasions are unpredictable occurrences relevant to all institutions but with a differential impact on those institutions. In some cases, the impact is a consequence of a college's identity. In other cases, the impact forces discussion of change to the institution's mission or

identity. Examples include the 2008 financial crisis, changes to the Direct PLUS loan program, and the proposed federal college ratings system.

In the preceding findings chapters, I show how trustees view their responsibilities and their institutions. In this chapter, I add their views on responsibility for change and mission and identity. In Chapter 7, I aim to show how trustees make sense of their decisions—to preserve and adapt fundamental aspects of their colleges—as they seek to execute their responsibility for mission and identity within the context of institutions with complex identities.

Chapter 7: Explanations and Rationales

In the following chapter, I explore trustees' views on preservation and adaptation of certain aspects of their mission and identity. Regarding preservation, I find that trustees talk about protecting the institution's identity for reasons related to value. These trustees perceive their colleges as offering something of value to students or society. Participants also point out the role that money plays in keeping certain dimensions of identity in place. Finally, several trustees reveal how strategy explains why some aspects of the institutions' mission or identity are preserved.

As they talk about change to mission and identity, I find that trustees express different imperatives for some of their decisions. Some talk about adapting the mission and identity in order to maintain the institution's relevance. Others, meanwhile, unequivocally attribute change decisions to an attempt to keep the institution alive. Finally, language also is important to trustees' views on identity adaptation. I observe that informants frame changes to the liberal arts aspect of their colleges as evolution, an important, natural process.

Explaining the Status Quo

Value: Drawing a Line from Identity to Impact

In our discussions about responsibility for mission and identity, trustees expressed an imperative to balance change to their college with a commitment to

certain fundamental aspects with change to the institution. As I explored the data to understand their thinking, I found that some participants perceive fundamental aspects of their college to hold real value and benefit. Informants do not give the impression that they endeavor to preserve mission or identity for its own sake. Instead, they extol aspects such as small size, liberal arts, and residential education because they believe these dimensions hold educational, professional, and social value. Nancy, for instance, juxtaposes job-specific programs with liberal arts education, making a well-known assertion that the latter teaches students to learn, and thus better prepares them to succeed across multiple jobs:

Our feeling at our school is, while [career-focused education is] an admirable goal, that there is a universe of students in the world who will benefit from an education at our school because they have a broad foundation and even though they haven't had specific training in vocational skills, that they will, because of their broad training across many disciplines, academic excellence in the classroom, that they will be able to step into a career and learn on the job and converse with clients and superiors and peers and go onto be strong leaders and learn those skills on the job (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

Other trustees reflect on the residential aspect of their institutions, citing how physical presence—in classrooms, dining halls, and residences—contributes to students' education. David concedes that his board actively considers whether and how the college's commitment to the liberal arts and full-time residence can and should endure. These trustees remain convinced, however that those dimensions of the school have real value:

I do think that we have reaffirmed in our minds that we are residential and liberal arts, but we've added business and we watch and wonder and monitor how to best use the facilities on a year round basis.... But for the

moment we believe at its core something magic happens around liberal arts. People looking at each other and talking to each other and learning together. That's fundamental at the school (personal communication, March 19, 2015).

Kimberly joins David's view on the outcomes that accrue to students at a residential college, detailing the experiences that comprise the "magic" that David suggests happens when students are collocated:

Well, as I said, I think there's learning that takes place in the residential component of what we offer. There are things about just how you are going to function in society, how you're going to have civil discourse with people and all of the things that seem to be a little sorely missing. When you are living in a community with people with diverse experiences coming in and diverse ideas, then you learn those things (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

In Chapter Four, I offered views from three Catholic college trustees, shedding light on how community—an idea espoused by the colleges' sponsoring religious orders—is an important dimension of those colleges' identities. No surprise then, that Wes is among the trustees to extol the value of a residential college. He adds to David and Kimberly's views, pointing to the formation of individuals as a benefit that accrues to students who, in particular, attend a residential Catholic, liberal arts college. Below he elaborates on how families' expectations for the return on their college investment, together with apparent cost savings that technology can provide, threaten to change colleges' views on the distinct benefits of attending a residential institution:

So what's happening is colleges are being measured basically on content more so than I believe they should be.... What's the ROI on this investment that they have made?.... I think what that has done is a disservice to higher education because I tell people that especially in a residential liberal arts

environment—then even more so if it’s a faith-based college as well—you get three things for your investment in college. You get the content, you get experience, and you get formation (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

These trustees view residential education as key to facilitating co-curricular learning, experience (e.g. learning to civilly engage with individuals with differing opinions), and individual formation. For others trustees, the value of the small, residential college lies in how those aspects support students towards their education aspirations. The word that several trustees draw upon, including three of the four HBCU board chairs, is “nurturing.” Alex, the Catholic board chair who talked about community as an important aspect of his college, elaborates on how size and residence facilitate a nurturing campus culture. He observes that his college “is a place that, given its size, the student can get some very personal attention and they’re not anonymous within a larger campus. And I think that they’ll find that it’s a very structured and nurturing environment for them to succeed” (personal communication, April 10, 2015). Gary also extols the impact that small size and residency can have on creating a nurturing campus. In Chapter Four, I present his view that increasing the number of students on campus would “cut the nurturing in half” (personal communication, April 4, 2015). Below, he opines on the value of a nurturing education for college completion and engendering aspirations for graduate school:

I would like to think that one of the things—the nurturing part of the school...that that would be retained.... You walk in the door some of these schools, they start telling you why you’re not qualified to even get out of the school you’re in.... And so I think what we do is we tell you what you

can be. They don't deny you. They say you can be whatever you want to be. You've just got to work for it (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Single-sex colleges comprise nearly a third (i.e., 8) of the sample, and a few made comments revealing their perception that the college's single-sex character bore value for enrolled students. Justin, for instance, observes that his college "operate[s] under the premise that a woman learns differently and develops differently at different stages of life, and they play to that very well" (personal communication, April 17, 2015). Gary goes further, recalling the value proposition that the then-president spelled out to him and his wife upon visiting the campus with their college-age daughter:

So when we went back to the president's office, she explained to us why our daughter should [enroll at the college]. She made a very compelling case, and she said [to my daughter], "When you leave here, you will have two things. You will have confidence, and you will have capability. You will not be competing against men for any leadership roles or anything like that, so you will have a lot of opportunities to practice leadership in the real world before you get out there" (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Roland and Todd, the only men's college trustees in the group, are less clear about the specific benefit to students who attend an all-men's college. Yet they both point to men's education as the solution to challenges young men today face in their development and education. Roland explains:

We are a men's school because we're very good at educating men in a time when men's education in college is in a crisis. We are also very good in particular at educating young black men and young men of color (personal communication, April 16, 2015).

Todd shares the view that men's education has an educational benefit, noting that in the recent past, it was not clear that men's colleges served a distinct purpose. As he goes on to suggest, that time has passed:

But today being an all-male institution is no longer looked at as necessarily an anachronism. I mean, you look at any college campus. You show me a college campus where the [ratio of men to women] is 1:1, and I will show you an admissions office that is favoring males to get to that [ratio].... So what's going on with males? Why are we not working harder or more diligent? Why aren't we maturing more quickly and doing the things that past generations expected of males? So there are issues that can be dealt with in an all-male school that probably you couldn't deal with in a coed school or class.... and there really is a role for an all-male school as long as it's not viewed as being for substandard students because they can't make the grade or something like that. You want to be different without being weird (personal communication, April 9, 2015).

Money Matters

Resources matters when it comes to preserving or adapting aspects of a college's mission or identity. Whereas critics have taken colleges to task for their apparent slow response to changes in the higher education environment, they infrequently raise an obvious point: some change requires money. This fact is not lost on trustees in this sample. Some ideas cost more money than an institution has, forcing trustees to elect to retain aspects of the institution's identity that they may have otherwise voted to change. Roland, fiercely protective of his school's all-male identity, still concedes that the possibility of going co-ed is always present "like an elephant in the room." Even so, he points out that the cost of such an endeavor diminishes its prospects:

[Going coed] means more faculty. It means more dorms. It means athletics. A lot of things, in order to provide a quality educational experience. We don't have that kind of money. At least not right now. And so we've stuck to our guns, and we continue to do what we do best (personal communication, April 16, 2015).

Sean, chair of the board for a very small college, discusses his trustees' engagement with the issue of size, an important aspect of identity for many trustees in the study:

Yeah. So, we, in the last strategic planning process, actively revisited the topic of size. Because if you look at the operating model of the college if you increased the student body by fifty students it would dramatically change your operating budget in a way that would make it much easier to generate consistent surpluses (personal communication, March 14, 2015).

Nancy's board has also contemplated increasing the student body size, noting, like Sean's trustees, the relief that a larger student body—that is, a larger tuition revenue base—would provide for the college's operating budget:

We have, in the last ten or fifteen years, analyzed the possibility of growing the school. In part because of financial pressures, in part because if you are a small school it's hard to deliver all things to all people whether it's a full range of academic program and subjects, full sports teams, that kind of thing. And to reap the economic benefits of that growth, you would have to change the student:faculty ratio and make that a higher number and a less intimate classroom atmosphere and less close bond between the faculty and students (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

In each case, the boards elected to maintain the student body size. Each board chair cites as the primary reason the college's commitment to preserving the small-class experience. However, they also concede that resource issues—namely, the cost of building facilities to accommodate the larger student population—

effectively put the idea out of reach. Following is my exchange with Sean on the decision:

Interviewer: What do you think...the motivation there was for maintaining the current size?

Sean: I think there were a couple of things. I think there was just a belief that it would fundamentally change the experience of being a student or a faculty member there. It would fundamentally change some of the pedagogical components of the mission, larger class sizes. And, secondly, there was the specific concrete limitations of the school's footprint, property, meaning that it would have made...there were housing related issues that arose from it. There were some practical considerations, but those were secondary, but they were in the discussion (personal communication, March 14, 2015).

Nancy recounts a similar experience:

In the end—after we did all the analysis—we realized that we didn't want to move away from the student : faculty ratio that we had, and that it would be actually not economically beneficial, but detrimental to us. To add the students and get the revenue you'd have to add more classrooms, add more faculty, you'd have to add more cafeterias and more dorms. And by the end of it we looked at it and it was not an economic viability and we decided against it (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

The increasing use of technology among higher education institutions—to support learning, to increase revenue, to reduce cost—was a topic of discussion among several informants. Many imagine technology, online learning in particular, becoming a part of their campus offerings even while they wrestle with questions about how to adopt new forms of learning while still putting a premium on residential education and community. However, Isabelle and Wes, point to the otherwise unspoken issue of cost, an important detail for institutions that aspire to leverage technology towards their pedagogical and financial goals.

Notwithstanding her college's relative wealth, Isabelle, for example, observes that "the best [institutions offering online learning] are getting very technologically sophisticated in their delivery, and we don't have the support services to provide that high quality, very interactive, non-talking head kind of presentation for our faculty" (personal communication, March 17, 2015). Wes shares a different account, challenging the notion that going online is as simple as investing a little money:

In every emerging market, there's the early adopters, there's the shakeup period, and there's the failures. You've got to get market share and brand out there quick, and you better be able to sustain it, and sustain it probably needs venture money with somebody who's going to go over you, which you would be glad to have done to you.... Because while I'm sitting here talking to you, somebody from IBM is talking to somebody out in Chicago right now, and they're going to put \$100 million into this thing. You say you only need \$2 million to get up on the Internet. Believe me, would you be able to take out ads in the Wall Street Journal? Would you be able to sponsor somebody at the Grammys next year? That's what's going on in higher education right now (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

Of course, while the comments above illustrate how money can constrain the range of decisions available to trustees, I do not mean to give the impression that colleges unconditionally maintain certain aspects of their missions or identities because they have no money. That is simply not true. Colleges across the country, including several in this sample, are engaged in building and other projects that come at great cost. Indeed, it is conceivable that trustees' are not as constrained by money as some of their comments might suggest. Instead, perhaps the perceived high cost of, for example, transitioning to a coed college is an

excuse, a plausible reason to refrain from exploring change to a sacrosanct dimension of the college's identity.

Status Quo as a Strategy

Above, and at other points in this study, I have attempted to show how money concerns can inform trustees' views and decision-making vis-à-vis important aspects of their colleges' identities. While pursuit of these objectives—preserving identity and generating revenue—may, at times, appear to be at odds, trustees also talk about how mission or identity preservation lends itself to revenue generation through distinction. That is, retaining a distinct identity can help a college separate itself from competitors. Wes alluded to this idea when he suggested that residential, faith-based colleges should recognize and leverage their ability to provide content, experience, and formation. Other trustees in the sample echo this idea, giving shape to a strategy that leverages identity for the purpose of longevity. Justin points to the consequences of this strategy—market narrowing versus distinction—and offers his view on why remaining single sex works for his college:

Some people say [staying single sex] can work for or against you. It narrows our market, which can work against you. But in turn, [students] that are there are there because they should understand and have a real desire to be in a single-sex institution, so we can then get to work on educating our students in a way that we think is unique.... I think it makes it unique versus throwing you out there in a pool. That's a narrow focus. So you can implement change and then hopefully have impact quicker than being a "me too" because I do understand the different pools of schools. And if you are all alike, it's going to be very hard to distinguish yourself

versus we don't look like everybody else (personal communication, April 17, 2015).

Leonard describes his college as having created a niche by maintaining the premium it puts on small size. In doing so, they aim to clearly signal to prospective students the unique value the college offers:

I think we've carved out a niche for ourselves as an institution. Remain small enough to be nurturing, to be caring, to have a sense of community on campus, to be engaging so the community knows who we are, those kinds of things (personal communication, May 22, 2015).

Explaining Adaptation

As I illustrate earlier, trustees view managing change as their defining responsibility. Participants also express a responsibility for mission and identity. Thus these men and women engage in an ongoing effort to balance an imperative to adapt to a changing environment with preservation of key aspects of their institutions' identities. How do trustees reconcile the inevitability of change with the imperative to preserve some of their institutions' most fundamental aspects? Among the trustees in this sample, I found that trustees explain identity change at their institutions by putting a premium on survival or relevance and talking about change in terms of evolution.

Relevance and Survival

As I will show later in this section, trustees show great skill at nuance when explaining identity change among their institutions. However, for some trustees in the sample, the imperative to adapt to changes in the environment is motivated by

a simple question: can this institution survive if it does not change? As I have noted earlier, money is a concern among trustees in this study. Even informants from the most selective, well-endowed institutions make decisions that are sensitive to cost. The impact that change, or failing to change, can have among some institutions in the sample is more pronounced. Take for instance the view that some trustees take when talking about the importance of change within their institutions. Among these informants, continued “relevance” is an important consideration that motivates change. Alex illustrates this view as he reflects on the tension his board faces as it feels pressure to adapt the college in ways that might depart from its identity:

And how do we preserve our ideals and goals and how do we make sure those ideals and goals continue to be **relevant** [emphasis added] in the general public’s mind for what a higher education institution should be (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

Nancy shares a similar perspective, recounting the kind of change decisions and rationales her trustee board engages with:

I would say that we are constantly looking at change but most of the time it’s smaller changes: adding a building here, creating a new program there, adding a sport, looking at, for example, we’re in this world of massive online open courses and distance learning, looking at the way those changes are relevant to us and how we can continue to be **relevant** [emphasis added] in that world (personal communication, March 25, 2015).

Marlin goes further, suggesting that continued relevance, as a goal, is an essential imperative of an institution:

I just think that as society changes from time to time and values change and morals change and concepts change and methodologies change, that I think it’s incumbent on the institutions to change with them—to be current, to be

reflective, to be **relevant** [emphasis added]. And I think that's the goal (personal communication, March 13, 2015).

Gary, on the other hand, lays the foundation for a more pragmatic case for change, outlining a consideration that his and all other institutions in the sample must remain sensitive to:

One thing that we do know, if you don't meet your recruitment number, you're likely to have a lot of problems because we are a tuition- and room-and-board- based school.... And when you don't get those numbers, you don't have enough [revenue], and you end up with a deficit budget. That is a fact, and I don't care whether you're—even [Harvard] has that problem (personal communication, April 4, 2015).

Just as limited resources can constrain certain forms of change, the threat of losing money—and the demise of the institution—can motivate changes to the most deeply held aspects of an institution's identity. Consider for example, the commitment that Lawrence expresses towards the mission and identity of Historically Black Colleges:

Well, I think the mission of the HBCU, which coming out of the American Civil War, was to empower people on the bottom to grow and meet their own needs and have a better life and a more equitable share of the American pie. Those are values that I hold dear because I come from a working class background. My grandfather couldn't read and write. My father graduated from high school... So my life experience was one of economic and social mobility, and that's very much the mission of HBCUs as far as the historic constituency they serve (personal communication, March 18, 2015).

Notwithstanding the place that the HBCU holds in his heart, Lawrence's outlook on how the board must steward the college in order to ensure its survival is strikingly rational: "It doesn't matter how true we are to our history if we go broke and belly-up" (personal communication, March 18, 2015). Leonard, also an

HBCU board chair shares a similar view, putting the institution ahead of all constituencies and concerns. Below I ask him to describe the individual, group, or idea to which he feels responsible for his work as a trustee. His observation, like Lawrence's, illustrates the premium that he places on institutional survival:

I firmly believe we owe leadership - we owe the institution. If there's no institution, there are no students, there's no faculty, there's nothing, so for me it's about the institution.... Even with a student issue, you have to come down on the side of what's best for the institution. There's always another academic year. There's always another group of freshmen. There's always another group of seniors who are graduating, so you really have to make sure that the institution's best interests are being served at all times (personal communication, May 22, 2015).

It is important to note that the examples above come from the chairs of the study's HBCUs, among the least well-resourced institutions in the sample.

However, recall David's comment that "existential concerns affect the people's willingness to change" (personal communication, March 19, 2015) or Richard's assessment of the frequency that his board discusses change and why:

We talk about [change] a lot because I think we're a college that if we don't change, we're going to die. I mean, that sounds dramatic because we're still [an institution more than 100 years old] with [an endowment in the hundreds of millions] (personal communication, May 12, 2015).

Even trustees among the more selective college think in terms of institutional life or death, and reveal an inclination to decide in favor of change—even crucial identity change—in order to maintain their institutions' viability.

Leveraging Language to Rationalize Change

As I reveal above, study participants explain change to their institutions by pointing to an imperative to remain relevant or survive. I also find that the language trustees use to describe change at their institutions sheds light on how they make sense of those decisions that sometimes depart from the institutions' missions or identities. Specifically, I observe that trustees use language that signifies change as the right and natural response of their institutions. By using words such as "evolution" or "maturing," trustees paint a picture of their colleges as realizing their identities through growth, progressing towards a different stage in the institution's lifecycle that is at once better, different, and the same. What could otherwise be described simply as change is instead conceived of as a new interpretation of an old idea. Roland illustrates this idea, likening his institution, its mission, and identity to the United States Constitution:

It's a little bit like the U.S. Constitution, you know. It's a living document. And our college is a living thing. And our mission, our core values, our [code of conduct for young men]—these things have **evolved** [emphasis added] through time. They've probably been shaped in subtle ways, and they accommodate different situations, but the basic thrust, we have free speech. No matter how the First Amendment gets interpreted here, there, the other thing, it flies very differently today than it did in 1787, but through that whole time we've had free speech (personal communication, April 16, 2015).

This idea—that is, the "basic thrust" of the institution has endured but evolved—is visible in several trustees' views of change at their college. Brandi, for instance, describes how developing a small graduate program, has motivated the faculty to develop the undergraduate curriculum to help improve students' employability:

And so that whole conversation, as all of these things are, are **evolutionary** [emphasis added]. It was revolutionary when we thought about [developing a graduate program]. It's become more **evolutionary** [emphasis added] in sort of having the rest of the faculty say, "Ah, what would happen if we did a 3-2 with [an international institute of technology]?" Or maybe we should be doing something with [an international] School of Finance (personal communication, April 10, 2015).

The evolution, in this case, is a liberal arts education that promotes learning across disciplines and more deliberately readies students for the working world. The same kind of evolution is taking place at Richard's college. Below, he offers his vision for liberal arts education, and outlines how his institution aspires to preserve the basic thrust of liberal education while interpreting it for a new age:

Now I think the idea of a liberal arts education is going to be changing dramatically over time.... We've added, for example, a degree in business and a degree in public health. And I think this is where I think the idea of a liberal arts is going to **evolve** [emphasis added]. I think increasingly, you're going to go and read great literature and study languages, but you're also going to want to graduate with a degree and skill and experiences that are going to make you more marketable (personal communication, May 12, 2015).

The changes that Robert sees among liberal arts colleges, not specific to employment or marketability, still underscore the idea that the essence of liberal arts education remains unchanged.

There are refinements to the liberal arts needs. I think we are seeing a lot more, for instance, interdisciplinary work, you know challenges to the old way of thinking about departmental-based curriculum, but I don't view that as a threat to liberal arts. I view that as **an enhancement, a maturing** [emphasis added] of what the liberal arts are (personal communication, April 2, 2015).

The language of identity evolution extends beyond changes liberal arts dimensions of these colleges. In Chapter Four I presented views of several HBCU board chairs that elaborated upon why the “HBCU” designation did not precisely or fully reflect those colleges’ identity. Glen was among those board chairs, and cited growing non-Black student enrollment to explain his perception of the college’s identity. He offers more below, drawing upon the language of identity evolution to suggest that the college’s mission or identity have effectively endured:

You know, when it comes to the mission, it’s a lot more nuanced or subtle or it is... You know, we also want to be a welcoming environment for students other than African-Americans, and so we recognize that we have growing diversity in our student enrollment, and we want to be responsive to those students as well. We want them to feel included and support the University.... So it’s not really changing the mission, but it might be **expanding it or broadening it** [emphasis added] a little bit to make sure it includes the diversity in enrollment (personal communication, April 3, 2015).

Together, the language of evolution that these trustees draw upon recalls Wes’s view on how colleges today must adapt in order to both conform to shifts in the higher education landscape and retain fundamental aspects of their missions and identities:

Each college has to adopt a unique operating model that supports the image and their faculty, their students, their staff that would allow that college to be sustainable in an era where we’re going through a transition (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

What he suggests recalls the idea of balance between preservation and adaptation that some trustees express in Chapter six. In essence, colleges must

change in ways that are consistent with their identity and also support sustainability. At Wes's college, the evolved model includes a revenue-generating approach that leverages online learning and in-residence education to lower the cost of college for rising first-year college enrollees. Other trustees also have shown an inclination towards an evolved model, contemplating solutions that still reflect, in Alex's view, "who you are, what you are, what you want to be, or what your institution stands for" (personal communication, April 10, 2015). However, it is not a given that all trustees see an opportunity to so carefully adapt their institutions. As I show earlier, some trustees place such a premium on institutional survival that it is not clear whether fidelity to mission or identity will preclude some fundamental changes.

Summary

In this final set of findings, I present how trustees make sense of decisions and efforts to preserve or adapt certain fundamental aspects of their colleges' mission and identities. Some trustees, for instance, elaborate upon the educational or social value of their colleges, pointing to aspects such as residential education, small size, or single-sex campuses as elements that directly support students' learning and development. Just as trustees earlier talked about the role of faculty in the governance of these institutions, participants also point to shared governance with faculty and the culture of the academy to explain the sometimes-slow pace of change at their institutions. Money also is a consideration in matters of both

preservation and adaptation. In this chapter, trustees give evidence of how money—or perceived lack thereof—can constrain a board’s choices, thus sustaining the status quo. Finally, a handful of trustees take a strategic approach to preserving identity, maintaining certain aspects of their colleges because, in these trustees’ views, these aspects distinguish the schools from others.

In explaining change, two themes emerge in trustee comments. One participant group talks about adapting aspects of the mission and identity in order to stay current and “relevant.” Another set of trustees takes a more mundane view, laying out a case for change in order to ensure their institutions’ survival. Notwithstanding these trustees support or affection for their colleges’ history, identity, or heritage, survival is a priority imperative. Finally, some trustees, especially from liberal arts colleges, use the language of evolution to defend their decisions. Thus, adapting their curriculum, for instance, does not signify a change to the institution identity. Instead these decisions are simply different expressions of the same basic principle, at once allowing the colleges to adapt to changing conditions while remaining true to the core aspects of what it is.

Chapter 8 – Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

This study investigated trustee board chairs' views of their role and responsibilities, including their perceptions of their responsibility for their institutions' missions and identities. I present the findings from this study in the preceding chapters, including trustees' views on their responsibilities and their institutions (Chapters 4 and 5); participants' engagement with change vis-à-vis their colleges' missions and identities (Chapter 6); and the explanations and rationales that trustees offer for decisions related to changing aspects of an institution mission or identity. In this final chapter, I discuss four overall themes that emerge from this study. Following the discussion, I present two recommendations for research and practice. I close with a final reflection on the role of the trustee board chair.

The Real and Important Work of Trustees

The authority of a board of trustees derives from the collective. The board votes to change or preserve aspects of college or university; individuals do not have the power to make these decisions on their own. This study examined board chairs' perspectives on trusteeship, decision-making, and change. While my study participants may be first among equals, their views alone do not determine the direction of the board or its institution.

However, board chairs arguably are the most informed and dedicated members of the board. My interviews revealed these board chairs' high levels of

commitment, determination, and responsibility for their institutions. Their experience with college governance and their willingness to accept higher levels of trustee responsibility have positioned them to be knowledgeable, thoughtful commentators on their colleges and higher education more broadly. As non-employee volunteers of complex organizations, these board chairs display a keen understanding of college finance and administration, a strong sense of institutional mission, and a degree of humility and deference vis-à-vis the president and the faculty. As important, they are acutely aware of and sensitive to change in the environment, and express a readiness to help adapt their institutions to change in order to ensure their quality and sustainability.

The board chairs in this study view colleges and universities as constantly engaging with change. Furthermore, they perceive change management as the defining responsibility of the trustee. This is not altogether surprising: an organization that endeavors to survive must adapt to its environment. As the final decision makers for major institutional policy, it stands to reason that trustees would be closely and frequently engaged with the work of change. While preservation of their institutions' missions and identities are a major aspect of their change management responsibilities, these trustees revealed how even core aspects of their institutions' identities are subject to change in some form. Indeed, their knowledge of the world around them—demographic shifts, evolving social norms, emerging competitors—and their willingness and efforts to adapt to a new reality contradicts a chorus of voices that describe college and universities as insular and

otherwise unaware of forces that threaten to re-define common understandings of higher education. These trustees' views suggest that this critique is not true. Their boards and institutions are quite aware of unfolding developments in higher education and the broader world, and are actively engaged in efforts to protect against the demise of their institutions.

Yet these trustees are not unconditionally open to change. Some critics of American higher education claim that it has become corporatized, bureaucratic, and increasingly divorced from its primary function: education. Pundits often point to the disproportionate number of business people on college and university trustee boards as evidence that American higher education is governed by a logic of efficiency. There is evidence among these trustees, however, to suggest that they are committed to the teaching, learning, and research functions ascribed to education institutions. This commitment is perhaps best illustrated by participants' deference to the faculty in many areas, but particularly academic affairs, teaching, and the curriculum. These trustees did not draw on business jargon as they described their responsibilities and the future of their institutions. They also did not express a desire to join the board out of a sense of knowing what was best for the institution. Instead, they simply wanted to help, and, in many cases, were honored and humbled to be invited to the task.

Governance in Theory. Governance in Practice.

The normative and legal literatures, even the study's trustees, maintain that

trustees are responsible for broad policy setting. Their role is to govern, not manage. However, trustees' actions at times appear to depart from their perceptions of their overall responsibility for the college. That is, how trustees enact their governance role does not always align with their idealized perception of that responsibility. Participants consistently describe governance, not management, of their institutions as a condition of good trusteeship. There is evidence, though, that that view is superseded by their perception of themselves as the colleges' fiduciaries. Indeed, trustees from my sample talk quite openly about occasions during which close management is essential to their colleges' continued functioning. Andrew summarizes these occasions, observing that “. . . though you like to stay at the policy setting level at the college, if there is trouble in River City, well guess what, you go from ten thousand feet to one foot pretty quickly” (personal communication, March 21, 2015). Other trustees in the study agreed, offering examples of times—the 2008 financial crisis, an unexpected presidential transition—during which the board exercised a more management-oriented approach.

The importance of exercising restraint at an institution—governing, not managing—is a theme throughout the trusteeship literature. It is an approach that many trustees in this study share. However, the ubiquity of this view can create a misperception that close attention to the work of the college's leadership and administration is unwelcome, unproductive, or unlikely. Indeed, a strict view that boards do not “get in the weeds” may unnecessarily limit whether and how

institutions take advantage of their trustees' experience and abilities. The men and women in this study, for instance, bring considerable experience in problem solving and managing complex organizations. Indeed, Richard expressly recruited trustees with specific financial experience to bolster that board's ability to address the financial disruption the college faced during the 2008 financial crisis and following recession. While it may be important to help trustees develop sufficient judgment and restraint to distinguish their work from the president and her leadership team, it seems equally important to ensure that trustees have a sufficiently fluid view of the governance role so that they might take a hands-on approach under the appropriate conditions.

Indeed, there is an emerging view to suggest that boards can stand to be more involved in the work of their institutions. For example, in its report on trustee boards, the National Commission on College and University Board Governance concedes that boards should be more engaged than many are currently, and that this can be accomplished without resorting to trustee activism or substituting the board's judgment for that of the senior administration (AGB, 2014). In the Commission's view, areas such as finance and oversight of auxiliary and affiliated organizations could especially benefit from greater board attention and work, a view that several trustees in this study would likely agree. Indeed, participants from my sample might argue that their board already demonstrates the proposed approach to governance, having engaged so intently with, for instance, their institutions' finances during the financial crisis and recession. Less clear is

whether and how a new conception of college governance will figure into trustees' decision making as the economy improves and as new trustees are appointed to the board.

Trustees' Word Choices: Principled | Practical

The study's trustees make clear their sense of responsibility for their institutions' missions and identities. As I describe earlier, this responsibility takes the form of balancing preservation of certain identity aspects with adaptation of those same elements. One way that they endeavor to achieve this balance is through an expansion of their institutions' identities. Instead of narrowing in on a single aspect or core value, trustees point to other—often less visible—aspects that endure and, thus, reflect the colleges' ongoing commitment to its historical mission, identity, or heritage. What is interesting about this approach is how it can serve both principled and practical aims. For instance, in Chapter 5 I shared several HBCU trustees' views on their colleges. With one exception, these board chairs did not expressly identify their institutions as Historically Black. Instead they referenced elements such as small size and a nurturing environment or the racial diversity among the faculty and staff. I thought it curious that they neglected to mention what, to me, was the most salient aspect of their colleges' identities. On the other hand, HBCU's have been open to non-Black students since their founding. These board chairs' descriptions of their institutions could simply reflect their attempt to more fully and honestly portray the colleges. Similarly, the

Catholic colleges in this sample have presumably always held community among their core values. Therefore it should come as no surprise when several trustees from these colleges cite community, not Catholic, as a main aspect of the institutions' identities. Notably, these HBCUs and Catholic colleges can point to these elements—size, culture, community—as evidence that their institutions' identities have not changed in the face of a shifting environment.

At the same time, trustees' expansive view of their institutions may also reflect more practical concerns. The demographic shift projected to take place among college age students is well documented. HBCU trustees' more encompassing description of their colleges may be a function of this student population change. That is, identifying the institutions with aspects other than their Black heritage may make the colleges more appealing to non-Black students, thereby ensuring that enrollment remains stable or grows even as the population of Black prospective students may decline. Catholic college trustees may be similarly motivated. Notwithstanding the Catholic mission and identity that these colleges retain, declining enrollment of Catholic students likely puts pressure on these institutions to recruit and enroll non-Catholics. By drawing on a core value such as community, the study's trustees can assert fidelity to the institutions' identities and make clear that the colleges invite students from all religious backgrounds.

Incremental Change Towards Extinction

Notwithstanding trustees' aims to preserve important aspects of their

institutions' identities, it is conceivable that, over time, these institutions will experience such change so as to be indistinguishable from other colleges. While trustees from the sample assert that aspects such as size and residential education are central to their identity, those elements alone are not sufficient to distinguish one of these colleges from another. Every institution in this sample, for instance, is residential and relatively small. Thus, while HBCUs might maintain that a nurturing and supportive environment helps these institutions stand out from other institutions, the racial profile of these colleges and universities most visibly separates them from others. Catholic colleges have contemplated for some time the impact that certain forces of change will have on those institutions. Along with declining Catholic student enrollment, these institutions are also facing a decline in the clergy leadership. Several Catholic colleges have appointed lay people as presidents. Trustees from this study talk about their responsibility to preserve the institution's Catholic values and traditions even after the clergy are gone, and how the spirit of the religious order remains even though the number of priests on college campuses is greatly reduced.

The shift from being single-sex to co-ed that took place among many American institutions in the 1970's offers some insight into how major change to a college's identity can alter the public's perception of that institution. The single-sex aspect of these institutions for instance is often evident only in the college's history. However, becoming a co-ed college is a dramatic, discontinuous event presumably precipitated by a board's decision making. This differs from the

incremental change of introducing a business curriculum at a liberal arts college or the slow annual decline in Catholic enrollees to a Catholic college. Yet the outcome, over time, may be the same: institutions that once clearly stood apart from others along visible dimensions become indistinguishable from others as they adapt to in order to survive. On the other hand, if distinct but less tangible aspects of being Catholic, Historically Black, liberal arts, or single-sex endure, then perhaps these institutions will continue to stand apart even if they appear the same.

Recommendations

This study's objective was to shed light on how trustees' view their work, particularly in view of the changing higher education landscape. I did not engage in this work with the intention of offering recommendations to trustee boards or others who might find this study relevant to their work. However, I present below two ideas—for research and practice, respectively—that emerged from my experience with research on trustee boards and my conversations with board chairs.

Research Recommendation: Conduct study on public college trustees' conception of "good" trusteeship and responsibility for change.

As I assert in Chapter 2, one major contribution of this study is its empirical investigation of anecdotal claims about the role and responsibilities of trustees. In Chapter 3, I elaborate on why I narrowed the focus of this study to private colleges. However, the literature and our understanding of college and university

trustees also stand to benefit from a study of public college trustees' perceptions of their role and "good" trusteeship. This kind of work is important for at least two reasons. First, public colleges and universities educate the majority of students enrolled in American higher education: in 2012, approximately 60% of all students enrolled at a 4-year institution were at a public college or university (Snyder & Dillow, 2013) Thus, investigating these trustees' conception of their role, particularly their sense of themselves as change managers, has profound implications for our understanding of whether and how these institutions will respond to a changing higher education landscape. A study among these institutions' trustees is also important because public college trustee boards are notably different from their private college counterparts. Public boards, on average, are smaller than those governing private colleges. The appointment process for these trustees is different also; in many cases, the governor or legislature appoints an individual to serve one of the state's institutions. Thus, private and public trustee boards also differ in terms of accountability: public boards are expressly accountable to the state board of higher education.

A researcher could design an interview-based qualitative study that focuses on a set of public college trustees from among a narrow band of public institutions (e.g., undergraduate institutions) whom to interview about their views on trusteeship. Because all states uphold open meeting laws, a researcher could supplement his or her interview findings with data from meeting minutes and agendas. This approach to triangulating my interview data was not available to me

due to my focus on private colleges. While the interview questions that I use could also be suitable for this study, a researcher for the proposed study might also consider developing a set of unwritten follow up questions related to state higher education policy, declining state support of higher education, and the impact, if any, of changes in the legislature or governor's office.

Recommendation for Practice: Focus professional development efforts on board chairs, not simply trustees.

I present my research as a study about college trustees. However, more precisely it is a study about the views of trustee board chairs. Two things stand out from my conversation with these men and women. First, these board chairs take responsibility for developing their board's capacity to govern, including the education of new members. Next, board chairs may not have the benefit of a peer group or mentor with whom to consult on issues of board leadership. Earlier in this chapter I pointed out that my conversations with participants did not consistently shed light on whether and how the board was responsible for educating participants on the role of a trustee. However, since becoming chair, several participants have made trustee education a priority, aiming to ensure that new members understand their role and feel like full members of the board. The action by these members suggests that the board chair is a good vehicle through which to deliver information about effective trusteeship. As such, I recommend that organizations such as the AGB devise ways in which to engage board chairs on the latest research and thinking regarding trusteeship. Specifically, I suggest

that organizations that offer professional education programs for college presidents expand their focus to include trustee board chairs. Doing so, I believe, has at least two positive consequences. First, professional education for board chairs grants participants the chance to participate in a conversation about higher education and trusteeship that expands beyond their campus. A formal convening of these men and women also allows for a diversity of views on effective trusteeship that may challenge historical conceptions of the role that may limit a board's ability to effectively govern. As important, as my conversation with Chad²¹ suggests, some board chairs may benefit from a peer group or other resource to consult about their responsibility. Although trustees, relative to the college president, are not typically the focus of discussion about higher education leadership, it is not a given that these men and women do not experience challenges similar to the head of any major organization. Furthermore, we cannot assume that these men and women feel comfortable sharing the burdens of the board chair role with their fellow trustees or the institution's president. Indeed, board chairs may find a group of peers to be a welcome resource as they endeavor to steward their institutions into the future.

²¹ In the "Study Reflections" sub-section of the Research Design and Methods chapter, I recount an exchange I had with Chad during which he solicits my opinion about convening a group of trustees to discuss their work.

Conclusion

Together, the findings from this study reveal trustees who are deeply committed to their institutions, and whose views of good trusteeship encompass both a willingness to change a college and to preserve important aspects of its mission and identity. Whereas trustee boards have at times been viewed as simply honorific or ceremonial, the individuals in this study suggest otherwise. Indeed, they, as board chairs, are very much engaged with their institutions and well aware of the challenges that they face. Each, in his or her own way, is optimistic about the future of his or her college. Some of the colleges have the benefit of great wealth and increasing student interest. Others express confidence that the changes they are making to the school will ensure its longevity. Regardless of the outcomes for these colleges, this study has pulled back further the curtain on trustees. By making these individuals the focus of research attention, I have tried to offer a perspective—their own—that will help us better understand the opportunities and challenges for better governance. What I have learned is that whether and how colleges and universities as we currently understand them continue to endure will rely in part on trustee boards, men and women tasked with the safekeeping of our education institutions. Those trustee boards will look to the board chair to set the agenda and tone that will inform whether and how colleges retain a sense of self while evolving to fit the environment around it. A relatively obscure figure, he or she will assume responsibility for the college for a time. When the college excels, the chair's contributions will likely go unnoticed. When the college stumbles or

falls short, the chair must stand up to be held to account. The men and women in this study understand and fully accept this profound—sometimes thankless—responsibility. They believe that they are up to the task; time will reveal if they are right. Regardless of the outcome, success or failure, these men and women will have committed themselves fully and intensely to their job. For that effort and commitment, our institutions—and society—owe them a debt of gratitude.

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Appendix A: Normative Conceptions of the Role and Responsibility of College and University Trustees as provided by the American Association of University Professors (1966), The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1973), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2010)

AAUP	Carnegie Commission	AGB
The governing board of an institution of higher education in the United States operates, with few exceptions, as the final institutional authority.	It is the final arbiter of internal disputes involving the administration, the faculty and students—the court of last resort for most disagreements.	The ultimate responsibility for governance of the institution rests in its governing board.
The board helps relate the institution to its chief community.	It acts as a “buffer” between society and the campus.	The board should play an important role in relating their institutions to the communities they serve.
The board plays a central role in relating the likely needs of the future to predictable resources.	It has the basic responsibility for the financial welfare of the campus.	The board should approve a budget and establish guidelines for resource allocation using a process that reflects strategic priorities.
The governing board has a special obligation to ensure that the history of the college or university shall serve as a prelude and inspiration to the future.	It defines the purposes to be followed and the standards to be met; it is the guardian of the mission of the campus.	
	It appoints and removes the president and other chief officers, and arranges for the administrative structure.	Governing boards have the ultimate responsibility to appoint and assess the performance of the president.
The governing board entrusts the conduct of administration to the administrative officers and the conduct of teaching and research to the faculty.		The board should establish effective ways to govern while respecting the culture of decision making in the academy.
	It is an “agent of change,” deciding what changes should be permitted and what changes should be encouraged and when.	
		Boards should ensure open communication with campus constituencies.
The board ensures the publication of codified statements that define the overall policies and procedures of the institution under its jurisdiction.		The governing board should manifest a commitment to accountability and transparency and should exemplify the behavior it expects of other participants in the governance process.

Appendix B: Sample Recruitment Letter

Dear «Salutation»:

I hope you are well. I write to ask for your help on behalf of Marc Johnson, a Morehouse College graduate and current HGSE doctoral student. This spring, Marc will begin collecting data for his dissertation, a qualitative study that will focus on trustees' views on "good" trusteeship. I have enclosed a copy of his proposal's abstract at the end of this message. Marc looks to interview several board chairs from private, non-profit colleges, and welcomes the chance to invite your board chair to participate. Would you be willing to put us in touch with your chair?

I am Marc's advisor, and have worked very closely with him on the development of this project for the past six months. I believe that it is a timely and important study, and Marc has my full support for this work. Importantly, he understands, as I do, the sensitive nature of trustee board work. If your chair agrees to participate, the remarks Marc collects will be presented among those of approximately 24 other board chairs. He will keep participants' and institutions' names anonymous, only describing the latter as, for example, "a private historically Black college." Moreover, participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. These, and other details related to the study, are spelled out in a consent form that Marc will share with the chair prior to meeting for the interview. Of course, Marc is happy to answer questions about his study if you or your chair needs greater assurance that this work will be conducted with great professionalism and care.

I may be reached via the contact information beneath my signature. If you would like to contact Marc directly, he may be reached by e-mail at maj550+trustees@mail.harvard.edu or by phone at 617.470.9280. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

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M. Johnson Dissertation Proposal Abstract

American colleges and universities are facing changes in the higher education environment that threaten the survival of some institutions, and may profoundly change how others conduct their teaching and research functions (Marcus, 2012; Pope & Writer, 2012; Powell, 2013). Although various groups within the higher education community—alumni, students, the faculty—may insist on directing how our colleges adapt to change, the board of trustees is an institution’s only explicit legal fiduciary.

Strictly defined, the board of trustees *is* the institution (Beck, 1947; Herron, 1969; Rauh, 1969); particularly among private colleges where the board is arguably accountable only to the granter of the school’s charter (Nason, 1975). A trustee’s charge is straightforward: promote the welfare and success of the institution. Yet how trustees perceive this responsibility—one that involves preservation of the school’s mission and identity and adapting the institution to change—is difficult to ascertain.

The literature on American college trustees provides some insight into the role. However, it stops short of shedding light on trustees’ perceptions of their duty, including during periods of change. By interviewing 25 board chairs from four-year, private colleges, I hope to help further open the “black box” of governance to extend what we know about trustees’ perception of trusteeship, their effectiveness in that role, and the implications of that perception on the strategic decisions that individual trustees and boards make regarding the institution’s future.

Appendix C: Consent Form Cover Letter and Consent Form

Dear «Salutation»:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research study on private college trustees. I have enclosed for your review an Interview Consent Information Form. Please read and sign it, and return it to me using the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Upon receiving the paper form, I will return an electronic copy to you for your records. Alternatively, you may return a signed, scanned copy of the form to me at maj550+trustees@mail.harvard.edu.

I will begin scheduling interviews during the week of February 24th. However, I cannot conduct an interview with any participant whose consent form I do not have. Thus, I am grateful for your prompt return of this document. If you have questions at any time about the consent form or the upcoming interview, please contact me by e-mail at maj550+trustees@mail.harvard.edu or by phone at 617.470.9280.

I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Marc A. Johnson

Enclosures

Interview Consent Information Form

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

Participation is voluntary

It is your choice whether or not to participate in this research. If you choose to participate, you may change your mind and leave the study at any time. Refusal to participate or stopping your participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to understand the role of college trustees in mediating change among 4-year private colleges.

How long will I take part in this research?

Your participation will involve one 60-90 minute interview between March-May 2014.

What can I expect if I take part in this research?

If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview to take place during the spring of 2014. You will be asked several questions. Some of them will be about your experience as a college trustee, and how you endeavor to serve as a responsible and effective fiduciary for the college. Others will be about the college's mission and identity. With your permission, I will audio record the interviews so I do not have to take so many notes.

What are the risks and possible discomforts?

If you choose to participate, no risks are anticipated.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

I cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include the satisfaction you may derive from telling your story about your experience as a trustee and board chair at the college you serve.

Will I be compensated for participating in this research?

You will not be compensated for participating in this research.

If I take part in this research, how will my privacy be protected? What happens to the information you collect?

Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your identity be revealed. At no time will the college's identity be revealed. You

and the college will be assigned a pseudonym. The recording will be destroyed one year after the research study is completed. The transcript, without your name, will be kept until one year after the report for this research is completed. The key code linking your name with your pseudonym will be kept in a locked file. Only I will have access to it. It will be destroyed when the report for this research is completed.

The data you give me will be used for my dissertation for my Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program, and may be used as the basis for future articles or presentations. I will not use your name or information that would identify you in any publications.

If I have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research study, whom can I talk to?

The researcher for this study is *Marc A. Johnson* who can be reached at

617.470.9280
204 Church St.
Milton, MA 02186
maj550+trustees@mail.harvard.edu

The faculty sponsor is Dr. Judith Block McLaughlin who can be reached at 617-495-3447
mclaugju@gse.harvard.edu.

- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints,
- If you would like to talk to the research team,
- If you think the research has harmed you, or
- If you wish to withdraw from the study.

This research has been reviewed by the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research at Harvard University. They can be reached at 617-496-2847, 1414 Massachusetts Avenue, Second Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138, or cuhs@fas.harvard.edu for any of the following:

- If your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team,
- If you cannot reach the research team,
- If you want to talk to someone besides the research team, or
- If you have questions about your rights as a research participant.

Statement of Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. All my questions about the research have been answered to my satisfaction.

SIGNATURE

Your signature below indicates your permission to take part in this research. You will be provided with a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

Appendix D: Study Participant Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Sample of Private College Trustee Board Chairs (2014)

	College Identity	Industry	Alumnus	Tenure: Board	Tenure: Board Chair
Andrew	Catholic	Business	Yes	7	2
Ellyn	Catholic	Business	Yes	7	0.42
Marlin	Catholic	Business	Yes	21	6
Wes	Catholic	Business	-	11	3
Edward	HBCU	Education	Yes	5	2.5
Glen	HBCU	Business	-	3	1
Lawrence	HBCU	Other	-	16	1.5
Leonard	HBCU	Other	Yes	4	1
Alex	Liberal Arts	Professional Services	Yes	15	5
Chad	Liberal Arts	Education	Yes	13	4.5
David	Liberal Arts	Business	-	18	3.5
Isabelle	Liberal Arts	Business	-	15	2
Marjorie	Liberal Arts	Business	-	4	1
Nancy	Liberal Arts	Business	Yes	15	0.75
Patrick	Liberal Arts	Business	-	11	8
Robert	Liberal Arts	Business	Yes	12	6
Sean	Liberal Arts	Business	-	7	2
Roland	Single Sex, M	Professional Services	Yes	18	7
Todd	Single Sex, M	Business	Yes	20	6
Brandi	Single Sex, W	Business	Yes	18	4
Gary	Single Sex, W	Business	-	12	3
Justin	Single Sex, W	Business	-	9	1
Kimberly	Single Sex, W	Business	Yes	7	3
Richard	Single Sex, W	Business	-	10	5
Sylvia	Single Sex, W	Business	Yes	11	2

Note: The numeric values for "Board Tenure" and "Board Chair Tenure" represent the number of years an participant has served as a trustee and a trustee board chair, respectively.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

1. If you had to describe the College to a young person or mentee, what would you say?
 - a) What is the college's mission?
 - b) What is its identity?
 - ("I noticed that you did not identify the College as (Insert identity here.). Is that also an element of its identity?")
2. How long have you been a trustee? How long have you been board chair?
3. Tell me how you came to join the board.
 - a) Why did the board choose you?
 - b) Why did you agree to serve? What did you hope to get out of the experience?
 - c) Why did the board choose you to be chair?
 - d) Why did you agree to serve as chair? What did you hope to get out of the experience?
4. Before you joined the board, what did you think a trustee did?
 - a) Where did you get that idea?
 - b) How did your initial vision of trusteeship match the reality? How did it differ?
5. When you first joined the board, to whom or what did you feel most responsible for your work?
 - a) How has this changed since you've become board chair?
6. Which issues, short- or long-term, does the board discuss most?
 - a) How frequently does the board discuss change at the college?
7. Please name three responsibilities of a trustee at the College.
 - a) How does responsibility for mission and identity fit within your trustee responsibilities?
8. Does the board ever discuss changes to the college's mission or identity?
 - a) Are there aspects of the mission or identity that will never change? Why?
9. Describe for me a specific time when the board deliberated on an issue that would change an aspect of the school's mission or identity. Take, for example, (Insert example here.). . . .
 - a) What priorities did you have to balance as you decided upon the right course of action?

- b) How do you decide upon the best direction for the college
10. Pretend that I'm a new trustee.
- a) What does a good trustee do?
 - b) How will I know that I have been effective?
11. Is there anything else I have not asked you about that you would like to add?

Appendix F: Interview Logistics Review Sheet

Before we begin, I want to quickly run through a few important details:

- This study is about trustees' perception of good trusteeship and change among private colleges. Please answer the questions in a way that makes sense to you. There are no "right" answers. If I think you have misunderstood what I have asked, or if I'm looking for a specific answer, I will tell you.
- I want to be respectful of your time. My goal is to complete this interview in about an hour. I'll use my watch to keep time. This is not a signal that you should rush or stop talking.
- As I spelled out in the consent form, I will disguise your and the college's name in my writing and in any discussion that I have related to this work. Although my sample size is small, you should be aware that yours is not the only college of its kind in the study. I hope that this will give you greater confidence that your comments today will not be attributed to you.

Participating Institutions as of [Date]	
Catholic Colleges	4
Historically Black Colleges	3
Liberal Arts Colleges	10
Men's Colleges	2
Women's Colleges	6
Total	25

- I will use a service to help me transcribe our conversation. As such, I will avoid using your name and that of the institution during our conversation.
- This study is distinct from other research on trustees because it draws from trustees themselves. I hope that you will feel comfortable speaking openly and candidly as that will only improve the inferences that I can draw about trusteeship among colleges today.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Vita

Marc A. Johnson

204 Church Street | Milton, MA 02186
p: (617) 470.9280 | e: marc_johnson@mail.harvard.edu

EDUCATION

Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) · Cambridge, MA

Doctoral Candidate (Ed.D.), Concentration in Higher Education

Expected

May 2015

Honors: Harvard University Presidential Fellowship

Harvard Graduate School of Education · Cambridge, MA

Master of Education: Administration, Planning, and Social Policy

June

1999

Honors: Class Marshal

Morehouse College · Atlanta, GA

Bachelor of Arts: English

May

1998

Honors: *Phi Beta Kappa*
Magna cum laude

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE – RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, AND STRATEGY

Office of the Academic Dean, Harvard Graduate School of Education · Cambridge, MA

Special Projects Analyst

9/13 - Present

- Consult with the Academic Dean on strategic and other initiatives undertaken or under consideration by her office. Provide research and analysis on select higher education programs, developments, and trends, and draft summary memos to provide decision support in areas such as technology-enabled learning, faculty support and development, and online learning.

Harvard Graduate School of Education · Cambridge, MA

Graduate Research Assistant

9/11 – Present

- Conduct research and analysis for higher education economist Bridget Terry Long on various higher education trends and policies relating to college access and affordability, remediation, retention, and graduation. Project responsibilities have included the following:
 - Analyzing college enrollment trends for racial and income groups using U.S. Census data
 - Writing annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, or narrative summaries on the federal Pell grant and TRIO programs, interventions for college degree attainment, and behavioral economics
 - Evaluating a web-based financial literacy program from a proposed experimental design study on reducing student loan default rates among college graduates

Wheaton College · Norton, MA

Independent Consultant

7/12 – 9/12

- Consulted with the college's senior leadership, including the president, provost, and vice-president for finance and administration on strategic initiatives aimed at boosting annual revenue.
- Analyzed trends in higher education mergers and acquisitions, strategic partnerships, and online learning; and directly contributed to a colleague's analysis in the areas of community program development, academic program development, and academic internships.

Synthesized findings into a summary report, providing recommendations supporting the institution's long-term revenue, and teaching and learning goals. Consistent with our findings, the college subsequently launched a business and management major.

HigherEd Insight • Washington, D.C.

Independent Consultant

2/12 – 3/12

- Co-wrote a concept proposal for a panel of financial aid policy experts employed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The concept, an online web portal called "The Knowledge Commons for Student Financial Aid," aims to motivate evidence-based policy reform by engaging financial aid practitioners, researchers, and policy makers in individual and collaborative research endeavors.

Harvard University Office of Institutional Research • Cambridge, MA

Summer Fellow and Special Projects Analyst

6/11 – 09/11

- Collaborated with a team of analysts on a presentation deck on undergraduate student achievement for the Harvard College dean. Led analysis of student performance in a first-year writing course sequence, employing regression analysis to predict student outcomes.
- Drafted a report that examined the University's 8-year non-faculty workforce trends, using IPEDS data to benchmark University employee trends against select peer institutions.

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation • Quincy, MA

Education Pioneers Fellow

7/10 – 08/10

- Partnered with the Director of Policy to produce a report for the Foundation's trustee board, synthesizing interview data from New England policy makers, analyzing each state's readiness for sustainable education policy change, and informing decisions on which districts and communities should receive planning grants in the Foundation's District Level Systems Change initiative.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE – DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI AFFAIRS

Boston College • Chestnut Hill, MA

Associate Director: Office of Capital Gifts

10/06 – 08/09

- Led planning for all major development and alumni relations activity in the southeastern U.S., including developing the travel, prospect visit, and event itinerary for the University's president during his annual visit to Florida.
- Managed a portfolio of approximately 300 alumni and parent prospects with a capacity rating of \$100,000 or greater living primarily in Georgia, Florida, and the Carolinas. Aimed to conduct 15 – 18 visits each month in order to rate or solicit each assigned prospect. Developed and executed a cultivation and solicitation plan for qualified prospects in order to secure a six-figure gift towards the University's \$1.5 billion 'Light The World' campaign.

Boston College • Chestnut Hill, MA

Senior Associate Director: The Boston College Fund – Classes Group

9/04 – 10/06

- Managed a portfolio of five alumni classes, including the 20th Reunion. Provided volunteer training and leadership to analyze class giving potential, set goals for revenue and participation, and facilitated ideas for pre-reunion events and programs. Managed 15 - 20 alumni volunteers from the reunion class in order to construct a class giving campaign that would yield a record-setting gift for the University. Personally solicited between 40 – 60 prospects annually.
- Supervised three Assistant Directors responsible for a combined portfolio of fifteen alumni classes and the corresponding 5th, 10th, and 15th Reunions. Collaborated closely with direct reports to enlist reunion volunteers, analyze class giving potential, set goals for revenue and participation, and devise solicitation strategies for leadership prospects in each class.

Bates College • Lewiston, ME

Associate Director: Office of Alumni and Parent Programs

5/03 – 8/04

Associate Director: The Bates Fund

9/01 – 5/03

- Constructed and oversaw a portfolio of 250 alumni and parent prospects with the capacity to be donors to the College's annual fund leadership gift program, The Mount David Society. Designed a cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship strategy for each prospect, and personally solicited no fewer than 35 individuals for a current-use gift to the College.
- Designed and executed, with alumni volunteers from two reunion classes, a class giving campaign and a 3-day reunion weekend program. Provided training and leadership to analyze class giving potential, set goals for revenue and participation, and facilitated ideas for weekend events and programs.
- Directed the College's paid student calling program, the Bobcat Callers, comprised of three call center directors and approximately 15 callers. Successfully increased the average annual gift size for the period between January and May 2003.

Dartmouth College • Hanover, NH

Associate Director: Dartmouth College Fund

6/01 – 8/01

Assistant Director

7/99 – 6/01

- Managed the class volunteer structures for nine classes, including three reunion classes. Provided leadership for volunteers by analyzing class giving potential, setting goals for revenue and participation, and developing solicitation strategies for top prospects. Identified, cultivated and personally solicited between 25 - 50 top Fund prospects by developing strategies in concert with offices including Research and Donor Relations, Leadership Giving, Gift Planning, and Principal Giving.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EXPERIENCE

SweetSpot (www.getsweetspot.com) • Harvard i-lab • Cambridge, MA

Co-Founder

5/14 - Present

- Launched venture to help online learners identify optimal learning spaces, including locations where other students are studying. Co-execute all functions necessary to advance through the ideation phase of development, including the following:
 - Consulting with leaders, experts, and entrepreneurs in the higher education, technology, and government sectors to define user and customer base
 - Executing a market research strategy, including trend analysis of online learning and mobile device use, in-person interviews, and partnering with two leading online course providers to survey students on their learning space preferences
 - Illustrating a proof of concept by drafting mobile application wireframes and launching a website for use among prospective users
- Secured \$10,000 in seed funding from the 2014 HGSE Summer Entrepreneurship Fellowship competition. Won residency in the Harvard i-lab 2014 summer Venture Incubation Program (VIP) and the i-lab fall 2014 Venture Incubation Program Plus (VIP+).

ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Title: *On My Watch: The Past, the Future, and the Role of American College Trustees*

To be submitted in May 2015 in fulfillment of the HGSE Dissertation requirement.

- Drawing upon data from interviews with 25 private college trustee boards chairs, I explore trustees' perceptions of their role and the mission and identity of their institutions. The research aims to reveal how trustees make sense of their responsibility, particularly their role in changing or preserving elements of the institution's identity in the face of profound change to American higher education.

Title: *Estimating the Causal Effect of Developmental Math on Student Outcomes at a Small Private College*

Submitted in fulfillment of the HGSE Qualifying Paper requirement

- Employed a quasi-experimental design study among student data at a small private college to estimate the causal effect of remedial math on enrollees' fall-to-fall persistence and grade in their first college-level math course. Results suggest no impact of remediation on fall-to-fall persistence among remedial students relative to their peers enrolled in college-level math. Results from analysis of students' college math performance show a positive relationship between developmental math and the first college-level math course grade. However, these findings cannot be causally interpreted due to changes in the study sample.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

<i>Harvard University Committee on Rights and Responsibilities</i>	9/14 – Present
<i>Harvard University Advisory Committee for Corporate Responsibility</i>	2/11 – 5/12
<i>Harvard University: Alumni Association</i>	10/05 - 5/08
<i>Harvard Graduate School of Education: Alumni Council</i>	10/04 - 6/08

PERSONAL INTERESTS

Bossa Nova · Foreign Cinema · Graphic Novels · Pop Art · Pizza Making